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ABSTRACT

This seminar on the Aboriginal motif in children's literature was opened by critic Walter McVitty with a paper entitled "The Presentation of Australian Aborigines and Their Culture in Children's Literature: A Brief Overview." In "Some Thoughts on the Aborigine as Presented in Children's Literature," Queensland author Bill Scott stressed the need for authors to understand the true nature of Aboriginal culture. Victoria children's literature consultant Margaret Dunkle assessed the changing, and generally improving, treatment of the Aborigine in children's literature. John Honey, Director of the Tasmanian Film Corporation, discussed the film "Manganinnie." His contribution pointed up problems of translating a children's book into an accurate, sympathetic, and effective screen protrayal of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. Honey's address was highlighted by Beth Roberts, who authored the book on which the film was based. In "On Writing for Children: The Aboriginal Motif," Rosalind Langford of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Center voiced her concern that negative social conditioning has already occurred due to biased and incorrect materials presently used in schools and on the shelves in libraries. Finally, Jim Everett, in "Why Aborigines Should Be Writing for Children," reacts to European dominance in the writing, publishing, and selecting of children's literature in Australia and urges Aborigines to write for children so that the Aboriginal story can be told from an indigenous perspective. (RH)

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THE ABORIGINAL MOTIF

IN

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Proceedings of a National Seminar held
at the University of Tasmania,
25-27 September, 1981.

Edited by
Twila A.J. Herr

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The editor would express her sincerest personal gratitude to two individuals for their special help. Mrs. Janet Rendo, not only gave invaluable support during the organising of the seminar, she also typed and where necessary retyped the papers of the proceedings. Much appreciated assistance with proof-reading was provided by Mrs. Berenice Eastman.

THE ABORIGINAL MOTIF

IN

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The exact origins of the Aboriginal Motif in Children's Literature Seminar would be difficult to untangle now but they involved two principal threads — that writing about and by Aborigines was important in contemporary Australia and that children's literature can be a significant influence on the way we look at the world around us. The material which was woven from the papers, comments, and discussions of the seminar was created from strands spun from these two threads. The weaving itself took place in Hobart on 25-27 September 1981 at the University of Tasmania. The seminar was sponsored by the Tasmanian Branches of the Library Association of Australia and the Children's Book Council, the University's School of Librarianship and with the advice of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee.

Papers were prepared by a range of scholars, writers and interested observers. The breadth of topics and issues addressed by the speakers was as diverse as their backgrounds. Not all the seminar centred on prepared papers. Both sessional and plenary discussions provided much scope for individual participation. This aspect of the seminar was regarded as crucial and, indeed, it was planned to include edited extracts from these discussions in the proceedings. Unhappily, the equipment recording the seminar malfunctioned. Not only did this result in the loss of some very interesting commentaries but it also delayed the publication of these proceedings as the technicians attempted unsuccessfully to recover the material on the tapes.

The seminar was opened by Walter McVitty of Melbourne State College, well known children's literature critic, with a paper entitled 'The Presentation of Australian Aborigines and their Culture in Children's Literature: A Brief Overview.' Beginning with what is believed to be the first children's

book to be published in Australia, *A Mother's Offering* (1841), and continuing through Patricia Wrightson's *Behind the Wind* (1981), Mr. McVitty surveys the Australian experience spanning almost a century and a half. Bill Scott, the noted Queensland author of *Boori* and *Darkness Under the Hills* speaks from the writer's perspective in his address, 'Some Thoughts on the Aborigine as presented in Children's Literature'. He stresses the need for authors to understand the true nature of Aboriginal culture, especially the spiritual ties between Aborigines and their environment. A third approach is offered by children's literature consultant of Victoria, Margaret Dunkle, through an assessment of the changing treatment of the Aborigine in children's literature. In general Ms. Dunkle concludes that the trend has been to a much improved quality particularly in the case of more recent works.

A marked shift in the format of the seminar occurred after lunch on the 26 September when the film "*Manganinnie*" was screened. John Honey, Director of the Tasmanian Film Corporation which produced the film, followed with a discussion of the motion picture. His contribution in this volume points up the problems experienced in translating the text of a children's book into an accurate and sympathetic yet effective screen portrayal of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. Mr. Honey's address was highlighted by the comments of Beth Roberts who authored the book on which the film was based.

Given that most Australian children's literature — whether past or present — has been written, published, or selected by Europeans, it is scarcely surprising that much of the available literature betrays its origins. Thus, the contributions from two members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community on the effects of this circumstance, significantly enhanced the work of the seminar. Jim Everett, an accomplished poet, urges Aborigines to write for children so that the Aboriginal story can be told from an Aboriginal perspective in

his paper 'Why Aborigines should be Writing for Children'. This is important both for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian children. The necessity to provide accurate information about Aborigines in the schools and libraries for children is emphasised by Rosalind Langford of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. She voices her concern that negative social conditioning has already occurred due to biased and incorrect material presently used in schools and on the shelves in libraries. Ms. Langford argues that such literature should be withdrawn.

The high standard of the seminar is evident in the papers included in this collection. Although the subject of this seminar was grounded in the Australian experience, the themes it raised are universal. The unwitting inculcation of attitudes towards peoples of other colours and cultures can become a human tragedy where these attitudes are based on distortion and bias. The importance of the issues discussed at this seminar is illustrated by the following story. Charlemae Rollins in the *Negro American Literature Forum* (1968) reports that after considerable thought and some soul searching she had included *Little Black Sambo* in a recommended book list. Some years later, on a class outing to a zoo, a little white girl called both a monkey and a black classmate 'Little Black Sambo', a taunt soon echoed by other classmates. "I can never forget the way that little boy looked. His day was ruined and so was mine. So, I thought this book is harmful. If a book hurts a child, there must be harm in it." Ms. Rollins suggests that such books are "wholly unsuited for today's children who are struggling so hard for unity and understanding."

Twila A.J. Herr
Seminar Convenor

REFERENCE

Rollins, Charlamae (1968) *Negro American Literature Forum*, V.2, No.4 Winter 1968 as reported in Robert B. Moore "A Letter from a Critic" in *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association.* V10, pp.211-213, 1982.

THE PRESENTATION OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES AND THEIR CULTURE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

WALTER McVITTY

The presentation of the Australian Aborigine and his culture in children's literature has been, from the beginning, a shamelessly racist catalogue of prejudice and misinformation, of superficial cliches, offensive stereotyping and entirely subjective interpretation. Although things have improved remarkably in recent times, there is still a long way to go.

A Mother's Offering (Barton, 1841), believed to be the first children's book actually published in Australia, includes a chapter called "Anecdotes of the Aborigines of New South Wales". Whatever its influence, its views would have made it a credible prototype for the books which followed during the nineteenth century. In its catechismic style, it sets the scene with heartless indifference and bizarre effect:

> *Mrs S.*- Little Sally the black child has been accidentally killed.
>
> *Clara.*- Oh! Mamma, do you know how?
>
> *Mrs S.*- She was playing in the barn, which is only a temporary one; and pulled down a heavy prop of wood upon herself. It fell on her temple; and killed her immediately.
>
> *Emma.*- Do you not think her mother will be very sorry, when she hears of it?
>
> *Mrs S.*- Alas! my dear children, her mother also met with an untimely death. These poor uncivilized people, most frequently meet with some deplorable end through giving way to unrestrained passions.
>
> *Julius.*- Oh! do tell us all you know about little Sally and her mother; if you please, Mamma? It will make the evening pass so pleasantly.
>
> (Barton, 1841, 197-8)

Mamma goes on enthusiastically to relate various anecdotes, each of which negatively illustrates the ways in which Aborigines supposedly treat their own children, such as by burying "living infants with deceased mothers". She tells

of a man who took his baby "by its feet and dashed its brains out against a tree". Little Clara adds: "You know Jenny has left three infants to perish in the bush; because, she said, it was too much trouble to rear them". Mamma says that, on her estate, bullocks and horses were frightened of Aborigines, not because of their colour but probably from the "unpleasant smell which they have; from want of cleanliness". The author makes no attempt at understanding Aboriginal culture.

In *A Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Australia* (Howitt, 1854), published thirteen years later, there is a considerable amount of equally negative reporting from its author W.S. Howitt who, no doubt, would have regarded his observations as being objectively true:

> We are living here in a land of savages....Travellers and writers agree in considering the Australian blacks as very low in the scale of humanity....They have left no monuments or lasting traces of their abode. They have always been wandering, but never seem to have advanced...though they have wandered over their country for ages, where the gold has been glittering in grains and nuggets, they have never discovered its value.
>
> (Howitt, 1854, 297)

Howitt was a skilled observer and reporter and although he went on to provide a good deal of genuine information in a disinterested and even-handed way, he could see things only through the eyes of an Englishman. Nor could he reconcile the evidence of his eyes with the romantic European notion of the "noble savage": he regretted that the Aborigines had "but very little of that bold fierceness which we consider a part of the character of the savage, and which often inspires something like respect". This disappointment at the reality of a race which did not match preconceived notions was a common response. A later writer, Ernest Favenc, was a man who knew Australia well,

having explored vast areas of its north. Yet for his adventure stories he invented and presented alternative native races which, for all their preposterousness, matched more closely the "educated" English reader's expectations of the "noble savage". In *Marooned on Australia* (1896) his almost-Arabic race of Quadrucos, so disdainful of the lowlier "Indians" of Western Australia, had even built for themselves a city-state sort of civilisation. The result might have added an extraordinarily exotic quality to please the foreign reader but only through the offensive rejection of a whole people and their way of life. One of the greatest hurts administered to the Aborigine, today as in the past, is the pretence that he does not exist, that he is somehow invisible.

Aborigines were often dispassionately presented as targets to be shot at (by British settlers) like American Indians in an antipodean Wild West: "Edwin now fired his rifle, and a black, who was conspicuous by his boldness, fell backwards from his position. Balgarra also brought down a man with his carbine...'Courage, old man, we shall soon be out of the gorge, when we can easily beat off those black demons'" (Hooley, 1897, 179). Typically, this book uses a stock vocabulary to categorise Aborigines as being blacks, demons, savages, fiends and cannibals - but never human beings.

At one point in George Manville Fenn's *First in the Field* (1894) the young British hero Nic encounters what he takes to be a savage black. His response is to regard the Aborigine as a legitimate target:

> Click went Nic's trigger, as a thrill of confidence ran through him, and, holding the piece at the ready, he presented it at the black's breast.
>
> At this the man made a bound backwards, and throwing himself into an attitude, he levelled

> his spear, as if about to hurl it and pierce Nic through.
>
> "I wish I knew the nigger," thought Nic, getting more confident; "I'd tell him if he'd go away I would not fire."
>
> (Fenn, 1894, 117)

After Nic discovers that the Aborigine is really a semi-"tame" station hand, he reflects: "I wish he had been a real savage, though, after all. It would have been far better fun". Thus is the Englishman cheated, deprived of his sport.

Early writers were also determined to pass on to their young readers their own feelings of repugnance about the physical features of people perceived to be different:

> He was a repulsive-looking old man. His hair and beard were thick and grizzled, and his face, all shrivelled and wrinkled, was jet-black and as shiny as if it had been greased. His eyes were the same colour as his skin, and the part of them that should have been white was a light coffee colour, which gave such a horrible look to his face it was no wonder Kat was frightened.
>
> (Chaffey, 1896, 303)

This extract, taken from M. Ella Chaffey's *The Youngsters of Murray Home* (1896) ends with the little girl Kat saying of the Aborigines: "I won't be quite so much afraid of blackfellows after this, Mamma. If I could just shut my eyes and not look at them I don't think I'd mind them a bit."

Similar responses are reinforced in the most pejorative terms in Ethel Pedley's well-known *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1899):

> Dot nearly screamed with fright at the sight. She had thought she would see a few Black folk, not a crowd of such terrible people as she beheld. They did not look like human beings at all, but like dreadful demons; they were so wicked and ugly in appearance....The firelight seemed to make the ferocious faces of the tribe still more hideous.
>
> (Pedley, 1899, 93)

Some Victorian writers attempted a more even-handed presentation:

> You see they were not treated fairly as first, I suppose. Anyhow, they must look upon us as intruders, although, of course, good land ought to be put to good use, and not left to a lot of half-naked savages. It's downright nonsense to say that the whole of this fine country belongs to those beggars. But then, perhaps, we might have helped ourselves to what we wanted with a bit less bluster. We - anyhow, our men - have hounded the poor beggars like kangaroo, shot 'em like bandicoots, taken their gins, and anything else we'd a mind to, though it isn't much they've got to be robbed of, poor devils. Of course it isn't in man - and I'm inclined to think that, after all, they *are* men and women of some kind - it isn't in man, I say, to stand that kind of thing without giving tit for tat; and then, again, it isn't natural we should let 'em off scot free when they turn the tables on us - often injuring men that never harmed 'em.
>
> (Rowe, 1880, 39)

It was far more common, however, to present a purely British colonial approach:

> People assume that the first stone, as it were, was thrown by the white settlers. *Nothing can be further from the truth.* The aborigines used to come about the farms and houses in a perfectly friendly manner, getting food and blankets and other things given to them. They benefited instead of suffered by the coming of the white people. That, in the long course of years, our occupation of the country would cause a diminution of their food, by the destruction and banishment of native game, is most true; but they were quite incapable of reasoning on the subject, and, as I before said, the first effects of English colonization were directly advantageous to them....They were certainly the very lowest type of humanity; the ugliest, least intelligent, and least teachable of savages...
>
> (Meredith, 1880, 80)

Mrs Aeneas Gunn's *Little Black Princess* (1905), no doubt written out of an interest in, and an affection for Aborigines is hugely condescending - (The "nigger" Bett Bett is discussed in the same terms as her dog, Sue):

> The first time I met Goggle Eye, he was weeding my garden, and I didn't know he was a King; I thought he was just an ordinary blackfellow. You see he didn't have a crown, and as he was only wearing a tassel and a belt made from his mother-in-law's hair, it was no wonder I made the mistake. It takes a good deal of practice to tell a King at a glance - when he's naked and pulling up weeds.
>
> I didn't like having even naked Kings about the homstead, so I said -
>
> "Goggle Eye, don't you think you had better have some more clothes on?"
>
> He grinned and looked very pleased, so I gave him a pair of blue cotton trousers. He put them on at once, without even troubling to go behind a bush, and asked my advice as to which leg he had better put in first. I gave him all the help I could and at last had him safely inside them, right side out, and the front where it ought to be.
>
> We gardened for a while, the old nigger and I, but as the sun became hotter I noticed that he kept pulling his trousers up over his knees. At last he sat down and took one leg right out.
>
> "What's the matter, Goggle Eye?" I asked. "Don't you like your trousers?"
>
> "Him bite me longa knee," he answered, meaning that they pinched him under the knee; then picking up his hoe again he worked till dinner time with one leg in and one out, and the trunk of the trousers fixed in some extraordinary way to his belt. After dinner he took both legs out and worked with the trousers dangling in front of him.
>
> "Too muchee hot fellow," he explained. Next morning he was dressed in his cool and airy tassel and belt, and nothing else.
>
> "Where are your trousers, Goggle Eye?" I asked, and, "Me bin knock up longa trousa," was all he said.
>
> A few days afterwards I met his lubra with a tucker-bag made of one of the legs; so I wasted no more trousers on his Majesty the King.

> I was always ready to listen to any old blackfellow telling about the strange laws and customs of the tribe. Very soon Goggle Eye found this out, and as sitting in the shade, yarning, suited the old rascal much better than gardening, we had many a long gossip.
>
> (Gunn, 1906, 12-14)

It is fashionable nowadays to brand Mary Grant Bruce as a racist, and there is no doubt that some statements in her earlier books are obviously offensive to today's sensibilities: Black Billy's grin is as expansive as "a slit in a coconut", and the author unfortunately speaks of his "dog-like devotion" to his white employers. In *From Billabong to London* (1915) Jim Linton tells the ship's doctor that the Aborigines are "a most unpleasant crowd - the lowest, I believe, in the scale of civilisation". Yet by the end of the *Billabong* saga the author has had a change of heart: Black Billy emerges as hero and, in *Billabong Riders* (1946) the same Jim Linton now defends the Aborigines: "We took their country; I reckon we owe them something. [An early recognition of the Land Rights issue?] We left them mighty little to live on...(Aboriginal culture) is a deeper thing than we can understand."

It is worth noting that Mary Grant Bruce always regarded *The Stone Axe of Burkamukk* (1922) as her finest and most important work. In spite of the appalling illustrations, these retellings of thirteen Aboriginal legends are still most readable, and have all the spontaneous immediacy of an oral tradition. Her version, and style, of "The Frog that Laughed" has a far more authentic ring than, say, Joanna Troughton's recent *What Made Tiddalik Laugh* (Nelson, 1977):

> Before Pund-jel, Maker of Men, peopled the earth with the black tribes, and very long before the first white man came to Australia, the animals which inhabited the land fell into a great

> trouble. And this is how it happened. Old Conara, the black chief, told it to me whilst we were fishing for cod in the Murray one hot night; and he had it from his father, whose mother had told him about it; while to her the story had come from her grandfather, who said he was a little boy when his grandfather had told him, saying he had had the story from Conara, the magpie, after whom he was named. And the magpies learn everything, so you see he ought to know.
>
> (Bruce, 1922, 115)

One of the first attempts to present Aboriginal culture in a respectful and responsible way was Mary Fitzgerald's *King Bungaree's Pyalla and Stories, Illustrative of Manners and Customs that Prevailed Among Australian Aborigines* (1891). However, the first really successful and longest surviving work of this kind is K.L. Parker's *Australian Legendary Tales* (1896) which its folklorist author took the trouble to collect from nine different tribes. It is still a major work, and was a turning point because it gave timely recognition and acceptance to the notion that Aborigines had a genuine culture of their own, to be taken seriously.

Another milestone was Frank Dalby Davison's *Children of the Dark People* (1936), one of the first books to present Aborigines as real people in their own right, with no spirit of condescension, drawing naturally on Aboriginal customs and beliefs rather than superimposing European form and values on them.

In more recent times researchers such as Roland Robinson (*Legend and Dreaming*, 1952; *Wandjina*, 1968) and Catherine Berndt (*Land of the Rainbow Snake*, 1979) have gone directly to the Aboriginal storytellers themselves. Robinson says, "One Aborigine who watched me writing down a story as he told it to me could not understand why I could not carry the story in my

head." It is hard to imagine any writer of one hundred years earlier recognising the irony inherent in such an observation.

Today we have writers who, wishing to find fantasy figures more appropriate than gauzy-winged fairies for an Australian idiom, have turned to the properly-recorded folklore of the Aborigines, finding there, after combing and sifting, an astonishing abundance of riches. Patricia Wrightson, interested in the notion of different cultures "flowing in and out of each other like seas" (rather than clashing) has, through an alchemy of her own, in *An Older Kind of Magic* and *The Nargun and the Stars*, annexed and given to today's children images of Nyols, Bitarrs and Potkooroks. Through her young Aboriginal hero Wirrun, in the saga made up of *The Ice is Coming* (1977), *The Dark Bright Water* (1978) and *Behind the Wind* (1981) she has forged the most powerful and accomplished work of children's fiction ever attempted by an Australian writer.

Bill Scott has achieved considerable success with his young Dreamtime hero in *Boori* (1978) and *Darkness Under the Hills* (1980), books which fully reflect the spirit and cadence of Aboriginal oral tradition, and written out of years of personal contact with Aboriginal storytellers themselves.

Thomas Roy's novel *The Curse of the Turtle* (1977) was hailed by Aboriginal senator Neville Bonner as a "revelation" which showed "insight and empathy" for the Aboriginal people. "May this be the forerunner of many more novels which will enable all Australians to enjoy the richness of my people's heritage and culture," he said at its launching. It tells of a friendship between the son of a white station owner and the local Aborigines, and makes explicit changing attitudes over the generations:

> It is incredible that my parents were not aware of what was happening on Oonaderra at that time. They had not the faintest idea of what I knew and had seen. But they were too remote from the Oona people to know or really care what happened to them. As long as the Aborigines were available to do the work required of them in the running of the property, that was all that mattered to my parents. To have suggested to my father that the Aborigines had evolved a culture rich in human values, so manifestly embodied in their tribal laws for those who would take the trouble to understand them, would have enraged him into a furious denunciation of them.
>
> (Roy, 1977, 65)

Max Fatchen's incorporation of Aboriginal motifs into his novel *The Spirit Wind* (1973) and *Chase through the Night* (1977) is due to this new awareness, arising from personal contact and experience with Aboriginal people:

> I was introduced to the songman and we talked about the land and he explained to me the playabout corrobories which were a kind of singalong around the fires at night - an explaining of legends.
>
> "And what do you explain?" I asked.
>
> He said: "We explain why the wind blows, how the clouds come, why fish swim, why grass grows, why the river runs and why rain falls."
>
> He did not sing for me because that was his private affair but he painted pictures for me and they were to remain in my mind as this encounter.
>
> I often wonder where he is and how he is with all the pressures that are now on his people. But I know that the river still runs and the rain falls and the grass grows and the wind blows. And that if he is still alive he will be making songs about them.
>
> And what he'd taught me was to remember the elemental things and the power of the enduring land itself.
>
> When I came to write *The Spirit Wind* and began shaping the character of Nunganee, that encounter with the songman remained vivid and beckoning just as the impression of the land itself remained.
>
> (Fatchen, 1979, 24)

Hesba Brinsmead has skilfully and beautifully shaped her story *Longtime Passing* (1971) around a local Daruk legend, just as Patricia Wrightson had done so brilliantly in her earlier *Rocks of Honey* (1960), a work which remains one of the finest achievements in Australian children's literature.

Audrey Oldfield's *Daughter of Two Worlds* (1970) is a successful attempt at seeing modern-day dilemmas through the eyes of an Aboriginal girl forced to reconcile two cultures - although it is overly didactic about it. An even better book is Pat Slater's *An Eagle for Pidgin* (1970), a well-written mystery story which places black and white children on equal terms within their friendship and the events of the novel.

The recent change which has seen our authors prepared to accept Aborigines and their culture on equal ground, according them long overdue respect and dignity, is due to many things. A growing world consciousness is surely one general factor, but much of today's writing owes its enlightened awareness to the precedent of Nan Chauncy's *Tangara* (1960) and *Mathinna's People* (1967). Writing in *Reading Time* (July 1970) Patricia Wrightson said:

> The effort of stepping out of one's own racial personality into another as different as the Australian Aboriginal is a tremendous one to make, even briefly. In *Tangara*, Nan herself scarcely attempted it. In *Mathinna's People* she achieved it for the whole space of a long and comprehensive novel. How could one fail to admire such achievement? Perhaps it was the effort itself that lifted her to an extra height of perception and portrayal; perhaps it was the vision she gained of Tasmania unmarred: perhaps it was the theme, with its inevitable, step-by-step approach of tragedy. The result is the same to a writer's eye: the sort of book that by itself justifies an author's existence.
>
> (p.31)

Even so it is still difficult for some modern writers to resist presenting young readers with the stereotyped image, the thoughtless cliché. Once an Aboriginal character is introduced, the predictable "grin" with teeth "flashing" from ear to ear appears as a sort of conditioned response - even in such otherwise remarkable works as Colin Thiele's *Storm Boy* (1963). Nance Donkin's prose in *Johnny Neptune* (1971) is typical: "It was the native, eyes rolling and teeth bared in a grin that made an enormous white hole in his black face." (1973, 100) Even the best writers revert to negative images. The Aborigines in Joan Phipson's *The Way Home* (1973) make noises "more like the sound of animals than people." (1973), 65) David Martin's "civilised" *Hughie* (1971) is, of course, good at art, but "He also knew what it was to get an attack of that restlessness which seemed to want to draw you away into the unknown." (1971, 27) This sort of comment only reinforces the cliché - indeed the superstitution - of white man, not black, that "walkabout" is a random or uncontrolled event in the life of nomads or, worse still, that it is somehow a mysteriously inherited instinct.

Non-fiction written for children has perhaps been even worse than fiction in its presentation of Aborigines. Most Australian histories still begin at 1770 and ignore the 40,000 year existence of the Aboriginal people, or else present them as a <u>problem</u>, or as stone-age people devoid of technology, social organisation, religion or ethics, lumping them in with the curious flora and fauna. The books still tend to ignore genocide, not only of the Tasmanians but of the countless mainland people who were slaughtered and poisoned.

Here is an extract from *Strange Races in Strange Lands* (n.d.), published in Britain for young children about forty years ago:

> This picture shows us a "corroborree" or dance of the Aborigines, or original inhabitants of Australia. These natives are very degraded and ignorant, more like monkeys than men and women. These "Blackfellows", as they are called, are very hideous, with dirty black skins, frizzy hair and very ugly faces.

There are possibly some school libraries today which still contain E.C.T. Horniblow's *People and Children of Wonderful Lands* (my copy 1953), which says of the Aborigines:

> They are rather ugly, have dark skins, and wear very few clothes. And they are not very clever, for they do not know how to grow food, or how to look after animals, or how to build good houses. At certain times of the year they paint themselves with great splashes of white, red and yellow. When painted like this, they get very excited, and do many strange dances. I should not like to be the child of one of these people. Would you?
>
> (pp.138-142)

What sort of defences do innocent children have against writing as bigoted and racist as this?

The Victorian Education Department's Class II Reading Book of 1905 contained the following officially-sanctioned prejudiced reading matter.

> 1. A hundred years ago, no one lived in our State but blackfellows. The white man had not come, and the blackfellow was king of the land.
>
> 2. In the places where now we see farms, and fields, and gardens, or great runs for sheep, the land was empty and silent. Here and there, a tribe of blacks moved along the rivers, or over the hills and plains, hunting and fishing for their food.
>
> 3. Then, the blackfellow was the master of the soil. But now, very few of them are left in Victoria, and, it is said, that soon there will be none. But they are found in other States of our land; in Queensland, and along the north coast, there are still many wild blacks. There they live, and follow their old customs. They hunt in the bush, and fish in the

> rivers, and some of them are very dangerous. They will kill any white people who fall into their hands.
>
> 4. The blackfellow is a very low form of savage. He cannot learn so well as many blacks in other lands. He can count only up to five; after that number, he uses a term which means "many".
>
> (pp.158-9)

It is gratifying to note that the current issue of the same Education Department's school magazine *Pursuit* (No. 5, 1981) contains a number of well-written, responsible and factual articles which successfully attempt to correct past misconceptions and prejudice about Aborigines.

It is to be hoped that librarians who are responsible for storing and providing information for the use of teachers and children will have long discarded items such as the following, which had been preserved in the vertical file of my last school library. It comes apparently from an old issue of *National Geographic*; the article is headed "Australia's Magic-Makers; primitive natives in the island continent":

> Amid the trains and spectacular buildings it would be difficult to realise that scattered through the vast tracts of the island are tribes of savages who believe in and practise "magic". These natives are less intelligent than most other uncivilised peoples. The natives of one district are brutal, even repulsive, in appearance; in another part they will have fairly well-formed features.
>
> The Aboriginal whom we know best, the popular type, may be described as a lean, wiry man, with a low forehead and shaggy, overhanging eyebrows, a broad flat nose; thick lips which do not, however, protrude like those of a negro, high cheekbones and a chin that is small and usually receding. He does not present a pleasing picture, especially when his face is adorned with a beard, whiskers and moustache.
>
> In intelligence the Australian native does not compare favourably with the coloured people of

> other lands. He belongs to an inferior race. He is content to live in a tribe, or a family, the leadership of which is held by a council of some of the older men. He possesses scarcely any of the arts and crafts of which other savage peoples can boast. It is typical of the low grade of intellect among the Aboriginals that...(etc.etc.)...

Although things have improved greatly in recent times, what is needed is an encouragement of, and willingness for, the Aboriginal people themselves to become involved in the writing of literature for the young. No European can truly express the Aborigine's relationship with the land, for instance, as deeply as Reg Saunders (the first Aboriginal officer in the Australian Army, holder of the Military Cross and MBE) has done:

> How can you own the sky? Is not the smell of wattle blossoms free for all? The birds of the air live with the wind. The sun is the creation of God and the giver of life. The land bears the ashes of our fathers' fathers. Creation is the essence of our living, sharing is our lifelong task. When all of these things are gone we have to die.
>
> The Aborigine standing in the forest sees his brothers, the trees. He hears the talk of the river and he sees his grandfather the mountain.
>
> The wind in his face is a caress of his mother; the earth upon which he stands is eternal. He belongs to this land.
>
> The dingo mother fed his spirit forbears with milk from her tits. The rainbow serpent made the rivers. The spirits of the dreamtime came from the darkness behind the sun to make this land, and then they created the Aborigine from the Earth's own creation. They made the sacred places for the councils of the Aborigine, they gave him wisdom and knowledge. They made him the keeper of the old, the protector of the weak, the teacher of innocents.
>
> The dreamtime is the beginning; the beginning is eternal and timeless, for when he is born again it is always the beginning. Only the wind and the sun and the warm red earth are eternal life.

To take the power from the earth is to cause great danger to us, the Aborigines; to invade our sacred places violates the wishes of the creator spirits and despoils our dreaming.

We respect the white man's dreaming. We won't invade his sacred places. We don't mind his God sharing the land with our God.

We only want our lands to remain timeless, we only want the purity of the air we first breathe to remain pure for our last breath, and when we return from our dreaming we want to breathe that same pure air again and again.

We, the Aborigines, love our land, our country and the water and sky around us. We bore arms alongside white brothers to defend it in two terrible conflicts; we volunteered although we owe no loyalty to the foreign kings. Our loyalties and love lie within the boundaries of our timeless land and are tied to our ancient cultures.

We have lived in this land for many thousands of years, we have obeyed its laws and bent to its will. We have no right to destroy the purity of its blood in the streams because it is our blood. To spit upon and ravage the land is to spit upon and ravage our fathers and our mothers, because it is both our father and our mother. How can we sell or barter that which we do not own? Our sacred spirit fathers must sleep in uneasy peace as we the mere children stand in silence.

The Aborigine speaks in many languages and like all people will disagree on many things material.

Today when we speak of land rights we do so with one voice, because land rights is both spiritual and material. It is material because I can put my "home" there, and spiritual because it is where I shall want to rest my ashes.

I cannot believe that my soul will be lost because my spiritual forbears have been dispossessed.

This land bears the ashes of our fathers.

It bears the will and titles of spiritual ancestors.

It is our peace and love.

It is our lore.

DJAMBI
(Reg Saunders)
(Melbourne *Age*, 8 June 1978, 2.)

White writers such as Bill Scott are at least trying to bridge the gap, to assist in the flow of cultures in and out of one another, and changing the face of Australian children's literature, at least in its response to Aboriginal life and customs:

> Perhaps the major thing that the *Boori* story has to say to young people, and in fact, all people, is that the original inhabitants of this country were men and women as we are. They had their religion and their heroes, their dreams and desires as we do. They were not strange animals to be exterminated so we could dwell in their country without the nagging reminder of their presence to catch at our conscience, they were people. The land accommodated them as it accommodates us; and as it will also accommodate our successors, and remain unaware of our passing. The land is impartial about what small things crawl upon its surface. We should realize our kinship with our predecessors. Certainly we could learn from the reverence and love they had for the land. It would help us be proud of the land, and of them.
>
> (Scott, 1981, 10)

Let us hope that Wandjuk Marika's prediction is correct, and that the need to "only connect" will be realised: "Over the next eighty years the writings of the Aboriginal people will develop as a distinct component within Australian literature, with its own consciousness and its own poetic tension". There <u>is</u> a long way to go, but misinformed and ignorant white writers have, in the past, made such regrettable mistakes in presenting Aboriginal life and culture to children that what is now needed is close involvement by Aboriginal writers themselves. Dick Roughsey's picture books, Kath Walker's *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972) and *The Aboriginal Children's History of Australia* (1978) are excellent examples of what can be achieved, and their general acceptance a

recognition of a belated need for such material - the like of which would have been unthinkable a century ago.

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SOME THOUGHTS ON THE ABORIGINE AS REPRESENTED IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

BILL SCOTT

The title of the talk I was going to give was 'Some Thoughts On The Aboriginal Motif In Australian Children's Literature'. One of the problems I had straight away was to find out what a motif was. I wasn't sure. I looked in the dictionary, but the definition was fairly vague. After listening to Walter (McVitty's) masterly exposition last night I have much more idea about what a motif is, so am on firmer ground and am able to go ahead this morning.

Now, first of all, if you think about an Aborigine as a motif, you get right away from the point; because Aborigines aren't motifs, they are people. This is something we must never forget for a moment, they are people, not motifs. If you start thinking about Aborigines as motifs, this may lead to the impression that writers choose deliberately what they are going to put into their books. Well, some writers may. I do know and have great admiration for writers who are careful planners. I know one man who writes books, not children's books, but he writes books. He sits down and draws up a programme. Chapter one, chapter two, chapter three; and then he has sub-headings about what is going to happen to each character in each chapter. He plans the whole thing methodically, and when he has it summarised, so to speak, he sits down and writes his book. Successful books; he makes a living from his writing. Perhaps he could plan an Aborigine as a motif; but I can't write that way myself.

From conversations with other writers, I suspect that my kind of writer is more numerous. Most of us seem to be fairly vague about the whole business, and quite a lot of things happen in our books that we don't plan. I was talking to a friend of mine named David Denholm once. Some of you will

remember him; he wrote two novels for adults many years ago, one called *The Last Blue Sea* and the other, *The Hollow Woodheap*. He published them under the pen-name of 'David Forrest'. I said to him, "David, how do you go about starting a novel, how do you begin?" He said :

> When I start a novel, I know where I am and where I am going. It's rather like looking down a railway tunnel. I am standing here in the sunlight, and away in the distance I can see a tiny ring of light, and that's where I am going. What's going to happen on the way, I'm not sure. That's how I write my novels.

Though I was only writing short stories and poems then, I felt that this was the way writing happened for me, also.

I must admit that at the time it never occurred to me that I would one day write a book for children, or that I would ever write a novel. It was unthinkable that I would ever write one book, let alone two, about Aborigines. I think it's the greatest lot of cheek in the world for a white man to write books about Aborigines. I think that Aborigines are the only people who can properly write books about Aborigines. Nevertheless I did. I didn't only do it once, I did it twice because the first book seemed to me to leave the story incomplete. I think it is complete now. I don't think there will be a third. If there is, it will be a very different kind of book from the other two.

My method of writing must sound fairly vague from the description I have given of the process. Actually, it isn't vague at all. Writers mightn't be too sure about the origin of some of the material they use, but they are very hard-headed when it comes to using that material and trying to get it down as clearly and meaningfully as possible.

I don't know if any of you are familiar with the Middle Eastern mystics called Sufis. The Sufis are Islamic mystics, and they teach their spiritual truths by telling funny stories. In fact, the greatest hero of the Sufi stories is an idiot sort of fellow called Mullah Nasru-ud-Din. There are a number of paperback books around, compiled by a fellow named Idries Shar; one called *The Pleasantries of the Incredible Mullah Nasr-ud-Din* and the other called *The Wisdom of the Idiots* that require reading and pondering about. Well, I think many writers are like Sufis, they are not sure where the stories come from but they are capable of writing them down and learning from them. There is a Sufi proverb that says,

'Sufis do not need scholars, but scholars need Sufis'.

Perhaps we might change that to read, in this instance,

'Writers do not need scholars, but scholars need writers'.

Scholars, of course, work backward; in that they take a completed thing and then analyse it to discover how it was done. The means that the writer used to achieve the particular thing he achieved, (if he has achieved anything!) Scholars have the wisdom of hindsight, and they are able to talk about luxuries like motifs. Writers are in a very different situation. They are sitting in front of a typewriter, and in that typewriter there is a piece of blank paper. They have got to make something where there was nothing before, and all they've got to do it with is words. Sufis and scholars are indeed different kinds of people, as also are writers and scholars. The writers make the books and the scholars study them. Scholars see motifs, but writers see and write about people. I guess that writers aren't very good at analysis, they have other things that absorb them.

I want to quote from that magnificent series of books by Joseph Campbell, four volumes called *The Masks of God*. This is a study of world mythology. From volume four, the one entitled *Creative Mythology*, comes this:

> Scholars, of course, have traced, described and taught school around traditions, and for scholars as a race, such work affords a career. However, it has nothing to do with creative life and what I am calling here 'Creative Myth', which springs from the unpredictable unprecedented experience in illumination of an object for our subject. It is in this secondary technical phase of creative art, communication, that the general treasury, the dictionary, so to speak, of the world's rich heritage of symbols, myth motifs and hero deeds may be called upon, either consciously or unconsciously, to render the message.

That's Joseph Campbell talking about the Sufic approach, and it is particularly apposite to what I want to go on to say about myths and fantasy. I think that both the books I wrote for young people are basically myths, but they are not retellings of traditional myths, they are myths that came to me as I went along because really I was trying to write about people and a social set-up; that of the Aborigines which existed before the invasion of Australia by white races. The spirits and the magic are there because the Aboriginal people believed in the spirits and the magic.

Let's have a look at the writing on fantasy and myth overseas in the past fifty years. There has been an enormous growth of interest in these things. Walter (McVitty) said last night, apropos of Aborigines believing in magic that in almost every library you go to there are shelves of books on esoteric subjects which shows that we have more

than a passing interest in magic ourselves. I certainly have a great interest in magic. I preserve an open mind about it. I think a lot of inexplicable things happen.

Now, overseas writers. The first one you have to talk about is Tolkien, because he went out into the wasteland, so to speak, of Nordic, English and Mediterranean mythology and came back bearing two lovely prizes; first of all *The Hobbit* and finally the three-volume classic, *The Lord of the Rings*. Immediately he showed the way, of course, all sorts of second-hand Tolkiens sprang up all over the place and we have had a whole surplus of books about the same things. Dwarves and Swords and Rings, (I am not knocking Ruth Park, that was a co-incidence). Dwarves and swords and rings, dragons and heroes; but none of the others managing to convey the sense of reality that Tolkien does. A few other writers have managed to create their own particular worlds that ring true; one has to mention Ursula le Guin with her wonderful *Earthsea* trilogy, and Susan Cooper with her five interlinked books about magical happenings in England. There is that curiously uneven writer Alan Garner; some of his work superb and some of it failing to measure up to the best he has done.

Paul Anderson, the American whose early work antedated Tolkien's Ring books, especially *The Broken Sword* where one of the dwarves he mentions has the same name as one of Tolkien's dwarves. There is no great mystery about this, both got the name from one of the Icelandic Eddas. I won't mention C.S. Lewis much here; he and Tolkien actually belonged to the same writer's club which met privately and it was inevitable that they had much in common. Of course, Lewis deliberately applied his sense of mythology to the Christian ethic, whereas Tolkien did it by implication, by allegory, but Lewis was far more direct.

Let us transfer from the world scene to Australia. What were our myths and fantasies here? Do we have any, did we have any? Well, previously we had an awful lot of fairies, all European ones except maybe for those of May Gibbs. We even had an author who called herself Pixie. But these were attempts to graft European folklore on to an Australian landscape, and as might be expected, the graft failed. It died, gangrene developed and the whole thing dropped off the body of our literature, and good riddance to it. Some of it is still being published, it is still being sold, mainly, I suspect because Aunts think this is what children want to read. Children are rarely asked what they want to read, unfortunately. We don't really have much room for fairies in our literature, not European ones, at least. Of course, we've got some archetypal banalities of our own that often turn up in manuscripts for children's books. I was a publisher's reader for five years, and during that time grew far too familiar with a few characters that seem to haunt the central thinking of some children's writers. In far too many cases I got manuscripts to read that had Father Christmas, a villainous dingo, a Jolly Swagman, a kindly old gum-tree that could deliver words of wisdom. Ho hum! After the Jolly Swagman and the kindly old gum-tree turned up for the twentieth time, any reader can be forgiven for getting bored.

It seems to be an unfortunate fact that many people think "I will be a writer. I will begin by writing for children because that will be easy!" It isn't, of course, it's a damn sight harder than writing for adults, if you want to do it well. Nevertheless we have had a wonderful breakthrough in the writing of fantasy for children in this country in the past twelve years or so. Walter says it began with *Tangara*. Well, in a sense

it did, but I think the really new thought was with Patricia Wrightson's book, *An Older Kind of Magic*. I must disagree with Walter here. I think the major step was made when she wrote that book. Of course, Patricia Wrightson had already written *The Rocks of Honey* earlier, but that wasn't the new concept, though it was a fine book. Suddenly we had this book about three white children living in the heart of Sydney, two on a roof-top; and one of them said,

> The spirits live in the land, have always lived in this land. They are not European spirits, they are not fairies, they don't have little gossamer wings, they don't dance in mushroom rings. Why would they go away simply because we choked them to death with concrete and bitumen? No, they are still here, they are right here, right in the middle of Sydney!

Now, that was an enormous jump for someone's mind to make, that is a really seminal idea. Of course, when it happened, a lot of people said, "Of course! She is right! Why didn't I think of that?" For me, when my children brought the book home and I read it, it was with great delight. Many times when I lived alone in the bush, particularly in my prospecting days when I was unsuccessfully chasing gold up a lot of spear-grass gullies at the back of Bundaberg, I had sat in the middle of the bush on a log or a stone, and it had spoken to me. Not aloud, of course, but the sense of communication was there; I seemed to have this strange sympathy, empathy with the landscape. When I read Patricia's book, I thought, "My God! That must have been what happened. Something was getting through to me". I don't claim that a spirit is an entity, a spirit can be a feeling. We have it in white culture, of course. If you go to a

cathedral that has stood for six, seven, eight hundred years and just sit there quietly, you can feel centuries of reverence come out of the stone-work of the walls and surround you with great peace. It isn't a peculiarly Australian or Aboriginal thing; it's something that can happen to any of us, anywhere in the world under the right situation and granted the right sensitivity.

At this time, about 1974, I had just resigned from my job and was determined to try to make a living as a writer. I had been Trade Manager for Jacaranda Press; and this was six months after the Brisbane flood which had destroyed the entire stock of books, and I stayed until the company was established and working again. Then I thought, "I don't want to be a Trade Manager, I want to be a writer, if I can," so I resigned. I had a very definite idea about the first book I wanted to tackle; I had thought about it a lot. I wanted to say how it had felt to be an ex-serviceman in this country immediately following the Second World War, because this was a crucial time in the social history of our nation. This was prior to the huge migrations arriving from overseas; you might say that 1947 - 48 - 49 were the last years of the old Australia of the thirties and twenties and the early part of the century. We still held many of the customs and beliefs of that earlier time which have vanished in these more sophisticated times. I wanted to record these, and how they affected our outlook on daily life. I wanted to do it as a personal history because I travelled widely in the eastern States during that time, and worked at many trades.

I sat down at the typewriter to write this book, and to my utter astonishment found that I didn't write the planned book at all. During the next six weeks I wrote the first draft of a children's novel, and what was more, a novel dealing with the

Aboriginal people. I didn't plan it, I didn't really try hard to write it, it was given to me, and I wrote it down. I can't explain this. All I can say is that maybe I had unconsciously constructed this book in my mind, and that when it was ready to come out, it just ran down my arms on to the page. You can say that it was a function of the unconscious mind, which is a nice, bland way of saying that it is something we don't know anything about. Of course, once it was on the pages the real work began. I re-wrote it three times before I eventually sent it to a publisher; which happened about two years later. The first two publishers were not especially interested, one reader's comment being that it was hard to judge because it was a 'new form', which it wasn't really. But I was delighted when at last Oxford decided to accept it, because I felt it had something to say; a way of looking at the landscape which was natural to the Aborigine but not to the white man.

Let me come back to something I mentioned early on in this talk. What right had I, a white man, to try to write about Aborigines and tribal society? Well, I did have some background. I had this empathy with the landscape I have mentioned. The lady who gave the introduction was kind enough to say that the landscape does come through in the writing. Well, I did know the landscape I was writing about; and by using imagination, it was possible to imagine what it might have looked like before it was altered. In fact, much of it, especially the western parts, has changed very little, especially if you get back from the roads and railways. But there was the problem of looking at the land through Aboriginal eyes rather than those of a white man.

Three of my best friends during my life, at one time and another, had been Aboriginal men, initiated men. I would like to to tell you about these men, because I suspect that I got more

useful knowledge from them than from any school I attended. This was probably my fault, I hated school and could not wait to leave as soon as I was legally able to do so. But I did learn much from these men.

Just after I married, my wife and I lived in a strange little house on the banks of the Johnstone River estuary in North Queensland. It was built from bush timber and second-hand roofing iron, and the floors were made from old case timber. Just down the road there was a solitary black man, an old man who lived in a much better house than mine, on a patch of blady grass in the jungle. He was blind in one eye. He was enormously dignified. One day I was fishing down by the river, and he came along and began fishing near me. I didn't know him, we had never met. I had been there for about two hours and hadn't got a bite, but he was pulling fish in one after the other and I thought "You know, there's something here I don't know," so I started to talk to him. He said the bait I was using was wrong, the fish weren't eating that stuff on that particular day! I thought, "Does he know all the fish in the river that well?" He did, you know. We got to be friends, and he told me a lot of things. His people had been the rain-forest people around Mount Annie, Daradgee, those places. I think that one of the reasons he told me things was because my hair went white very early in my life, and so I was able to be trusted, I could keep my mouth shut, which I did. I still keep my mouth shut about many of the things he told me because I don't know if they are secret things or things that can be talked about.

I would like to read an extract from a story I wrote once - it was a sort of memorial to him. About two years after I had met him I missed seeing him for a couple of days and I

thought he might be sick. I decided to take a bit of tucker across and check. As soon as I came near the hut I knew something had happened, because his dogs didn't race out to meet me and snarl as they usually did. But this is the end of the story -

> Peter was in the hut, dead. The story was easy to read from his tracks. He had come in on the top of the tide from fishing before daylight. He'd tossed the anchor over, slung the bag of fish on his back and waded the three yards ashore as usual. In the intense, pre-dawn dark he didn't see the dead mangrove tree the tide had floated in and left on the bank above his landing ledge. One of the iron-hard bleached branches had pieced his good eye. Totally blinded and alone, with only the dogs to guide him, he'd struggled toward the house only to stumble and break his right leg just above the ankle when only half-way up the slope. From the marks, he had lain there for some time. The ants would have wakened him, or the sun. He crawled the rest of the way to the hut but was too weak to scramble on to his bunk, then alone, except for his dogs, his heart gave up the struggle, and he died.

Well, that was the first of my Aboriginal friends. I had the unhappy fortune to be the one to discover his body. I remember him with great joy. I not only wrote the story about him, I also wrote a poem about Peter's death. I think that of all the poems I published, that one brought me more mail than any other. Years later it was included in an anthology for use in schools, and I remember my youngest daughter found it. She came home and said, "You never wrote that!" I said, "I did."

She said, "You've hidden that all these years." Apparently she must have got a surprise to discover that I wasn't such a tough old bushman as she had thought!

Now, the second of my Aboriginal friends was equally remarkable. His name was Wilf Reeves, and he wrote a book for children called *The Legends of Moonie Jarl*. Wilf was of the Butchulla people from Fraser Island. His mother, whom I met when she was a very old lady, was the daughter of an Archdeacon of the Anglican church who was sent to Australia not long after the wreck of the *'Stirling Castle'* to civilise those natives who treated Eliza Fraser so badly! I have some grave doubts about Eliza Fraser and the stories she told, by the way; she rarely told the same story twice. But the Anglican church decided they must civilise these savages. So the Archdeacon was sent out, and he brought his family with him. His children were brought up with Aboriginal children, and when his daughter was grown, she ran off and married an Aboriginal man. They had two children, Wilf and his sister Olga. I do hope that some day Olga can be persuaded to write the story of the family. It would be an irreplaceable document if she did.

When I met Mrs. Reeves she was very old, as I said, and Wilf was taking care of her, he was a single man. He was a returned soldier, one of the men who had been captured in Malaya, and he had never really recovered from that ordeal at Changi. His health was very bad, but he did write this book for children about some of the stories of his particular people. It was Wilf who told me about the Jun Jaree; it's a familiar spirit you can get to come and live in a bag around your neck. You may notice my character Boori has a Jun Jaree with him all the time. If you want to discover how to make your own Jun Jaree; (I know this is open knowledge, because Wilf put it in his book), you

should hunt around until you find his book and read the final chapter. In it he tells children how to get their own Jun Jaree to come and live with them. Maybe you might want one for yourself, I certainly have one. Wilf is also dead; you might say the war killed him because although he survived for some years, he never really recovered from the war.

The third man I want to talk about was very old when he died. His name was MacKenzie, William MacKenzie of Brisbane. He was the last surviving fully initiated man of the Brisbane Valley people, which was part of a larger confederacy of tribes in the region who intermarried and shared various activities. For instance, every three years they got together and sorted out their problems. This big meeting took place up at the Blackall Ranges north of Brisbane, when the Bunya pines bore their big crop of nuts each third year. I met him first when he came to visit the Scout pack. My son was a cub Scout, and Bill came out and was teaching the boys some of the skills of the Aboriginal people; about the spear and the thrower, and tracking. He was a very old man, he was in his eighties then. I found out he was a songman and he knew a lot of corroboree songs. Tape machines had just been put on the market, and I asked him if he would be prepared to tape some of the songs for me. It is wonderful to hear the voice of that man who is dead, still coming to me across the rattle of the boomerangs. From there it went on - I didn't see him very often. Where we had a bond in common was that I had lived in his country when I was a boy. I had been brought up at a place that was a very significant sacred site for those people. One day he said to me, "Where is your country?" I said, "Caboolture", and he said I was a carpet snake fellow because I came from there. When he found I knew this, he began to talk more to me, and

told me stories. Some if his stories are in print; Jacaranda Press printed a book called *Uncle Willie MacKenzie's Legends of the Goundirs*, which he dictated to his niece, Mrs. Sylvia Cairns. Now, that is a true book of real Australian fairy stories; I hope you try to find it.

He was the third man who told me things, and I learned something of his people's background and stories, a very useful background for a writer to have, though I never thought of it that way then. When Patricia's (Wrightson) book came along, I suppose it acted as a sort of catalyst. When she was writing *The Nargun and the Stars,* I was writing *Boori*. Of course, she published *The Nargun and the Stars* long before I published *Boori* because of the business of the re-writes and the difficulty in finding a publisher. It took five years altogether.

So, I wrote a book about Aboriginals for young people. I said at the start that it was a lot of cheek for me to try to write a book with a tribal background, if I was a white man. But it is amazing what little knowledge most white Australians have about tribal society, or even what wrong ideas they have. The tribal Aboriginal people worked out a marvellous social and ethical system for co-existing with their landscape and not destroying it. We might have learned from this. I hope later to speak more about this, but first I want to quote from an article I wrote in *Reading Time*.

> Too many of us forget that all races are composed of individuals, and of course, tribal society was no exception. The differences between aims of societies are often great. White society claims to aim to present the greatest possible freedom to the individual, whereas Aboriginal society was designed for

> the survival of the group rather than the individual in the group. Like our own, Aboriginal tribe society was composed of poets, dreamers, warriors and workers; the selfish and the greedy as well as the humble and the generous. Where it succeeded best, beyond the success of our own society was in the acceptance of the law which governed all the circumstances of life for tribal Aborigines. We have law, too, but it doesn't govern our lives to the same extent.

Well, apart from general apathy and lack of interest; why is it that so many white Australians have so little idea of the workings, or even of the existence of the complex way in which tribal society worked? Perhaps it is because some of the very few sources of information we have about especially South-eastern Australian tribal organisation must be regarded as suspect. There were a very few people with no axe to grind and a genuine interest who bothered to ask questions and record some answers, but our main sources are either from missionaries or anthropologists.

Missionaries first, then. Why must we look very carefully at their accounts? They obviously had their own axe to grind, though many of them were well-meaning folk who worked very hard. For a start, they are obviously going to denigrate any native spiritual belief. After all, it couldn't be as good as the true faith they were there to bring to the people, could it? These were superstitions that had to be crushed out. Of course, this didn't only happen in this country, it happened across the Pacific, in America, in India and in Africa; there was a great burning of idols and crushing of native beliefs; the bringers of the True Faith acted with their inexorable Victorian gentility: they smote the heathen and destroyed their evil ways,

they put them into clothes and gave them Bibles printed in their native tongue even though they couldn't read them in most cases. Their reporting must be viewed with some reserve: they weren't there to study native theology, they were there to save souls. If only they hadn't been so sure that they had the only answer! Of course, the native peoples observed that while they themselves had been reasonably honest in their own, old beliefs; and that the missionaries mostly stuck to their own creed, yet the rest of the white men did not apply or live by the teachings of the missionaries, though perhaps some of them paid lip service to the tenets of the faith. So mostly, writings by missionaries are a little one-eyed, to say the least. They were mostly truly sincere people, but they were too sure that there could be only one scale of values.

Anthropologists, on the other hand, tend to be too scientifically abstract in their approach to people. They seem to be concerned with skull measurements and the nutritional values of foods rather than with ethical values; and perhaps this is what the disciplines of their science demand from them. They are more concerned with recording social customs as curiosities rather than as tested means of overcoming certain difficulties that arise in the course of everyday life. I had an anthropology book once which spoke only of 'subjects'. 'Subject was a male, about 55 years,' and so on. You have to think of people rather than subjects. Years ago, when I was working at a sugar mill in North Queensland, we had a Cane Inspector whose job it was to detail the work that had to be done for the day. He would speak only to the gangers of the various gangs - "Take six units and clear out the bridge at the three-mile," he would say. We weren't men, we were units. Well, that was what we were to that man, I suppose; six units with twelve hands, but I resented the term then and I resent it still. So, for me, Aborigines are people, not units, or subjects or even motifs.

There are three white men whose writings about Aborigines repay reading, especially. No doubt there are others, but it has always seems to me that these three got very close to Aboriginal people and felt that kinship with them that informs their writing with true warmth. The first was the late Bill Harney. Bill was married to an Aboriginal girl. It may be significant - he told me once that just before she died, she died quite young of tuberculosis, she said to him, "Bill, don't let the kids go to a mission." Now, she was a mission girl herself, and yet those were her words not long before she died. They had two children; as it turned out the little girl died shortly after her mother, and the boy was drowned trying to rescue someone from a flooded river in the Wet, which left Bill alone for the last few years of his life. Amazing man, a great bushman, a good friend and a generous man. His books are all worth reading, he takes you by the hand and he tells you stories, as a story-teller should.

Another writer who wrote warmly and most understandingly about the Aboriginal people was Alan Marshall. He couldn't live with them physically as Bill Harney did, but he made a long trip to the north, visiting many tribal groups; and recorded what he saw in a book that is a wonderful example of understanding and sympathy. It was first published with the title *Ourselves Writ Strange*, but later reprinted as *These Were My Tribesmen*. I suggest that if you haven't read that book you get a copy and read it. Alan loved most of the people he met because they were so warm and natural, he felt great kinship for them and this affection and understanding comes through clearly in his writing.

A third writer who had sympathy and understanding for the Aboriginal people was Charles Mountford, especially in his

book *Brown Men and Red Sand*, the story of a journey made with members of the desert people. He, too, was a man with great understanding, and he could respect Aboriginal secret culture; though unfortunately he did publish a book very late in life which contained some material that should not have been made public. However, this situation wasn't altogether serious, because the Aboriginal people protested vigorously and the edition was recalled.

I do think that any writer, especially for children who intends writing about Aboriginal people should read the work of the three men I have mentioned as well as the standard anthropological works about the Aborigines.

What we have to think about next is the land, the landscape itself. These islands, the small one here and the big one over there are among the very few places left in the world where it is possible for you to go and be totally alone. There are wild places, in western Queensland and New South Wales; out in the Centre, over towards the Tanami, the Kimberleys; places like that. You can feel it there, with the hair on the back of your neck, in the pit of your stomach; the great brooding presence. Always, I am sure, on the border of our consciousness, it is there for almost all of us. You get literary critics all the time saying, "Why do people keep writing books about the outback? All of Australia lives in the coastal cities, why don't we write books about the cities?" I'm pretty sure that while most people do indeed live in the coastal cities, nevertheless they are always half-aware of the presence, out there, and are a bit nervous of it. Of course, writers are presumably sensitive people, how can they avoid writing about it? It gets under the skin, it gets behind them, and they have to talk about it, they have to write about it. Of course they could write

books about the cities; but I suspect that most people who live in cities don't want to read books about cities. But it seems to have become fashionable to say - "All this outbackery and nonsense, why do we go on doing this; we all live on the coast anyway, let's forget the bush for a while." But it won't go away.

Overseas people with some sensitivity certainly are aware of the huge, empty landscape out there. One of my favourite stories, and this really happened, concerns the Russian poet, Yevtushenko, who was brought to Australia for the Festival of Arts at Adelaide. He had only been in Australia about three or four days when the usual journalist asked him the standard idiot question - "What do you think of Australia, Mr. Yevtushenko?" Well, his experience had been to fly into Adelaide and have three days at a writers' week at the Festival. But he listed to the question, and thought about it, and then said, "A restaurant on the edge of a desert." Which seemed, I think, to be a fair comment, given his personal experience at the time. He had certainly seen the restaurant, or at least a number of them, but all the same he was very aware of the desert, which he had never seen.

When John Betjeman, the English poet, was in Australia, I met him in Brisbane. He had just come back from Townsville, and Charters Towers. He'd been up there, and he said to me, "How do you stand it here?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You sit here on the coast; just over the range back there, eightly miles, it's all rock and sand." The reaction of a civilised and sensitive Englishman coming to Australia. "All rock!" I think he could feel the giant spirit of the inland leaning on top of the ranges, looking down at this narrow coastal strip that we white men say we have tamed; while just on the other side of the ranges is "All that rock!"

This was the greatest success of tribal Aboriginal society, a spiritual success, their total identity with the land. No white man can possibly understand what the land means to a tribal Aborigine. This goes right back; every Aborigine had his own responsibility for the part of the land, that he called 'his country'. By their theory, each part of the country had its own spiritual guardian, as well as a man or a family or a group who were equally responsible for the ceremonies native to that particular part of the country.

If you read Captain Cook's log entry about his landing at Botany Bay with this in mind, events that took place there become clearer. There were a number of Aboriginal people camped there at the time. Some were out fishing in canoes, others were camped along the foreshore. Most of them ignored the white men, but two men; a middle-aged man and a younger one, came along and tried to put them off. They were brave against odds, they contested the landing, they threw spears; and it took musket fire to frighten them away. When I read about this I thought, of course, that was their country, that was the man who owned that bit of beach. He came down to put the intruders off, and his son or his nephew, the fellow who would be responsible after he died, he came with him. That is why they persisted, even after guns were fired over their heads, until blood was actually spilled, and they were forced to run away. That was the usual end to such an encounter. An Aborigine belongs to his country more than it belongs to him; he doesn't think of himself owning it in the European sense of ownership, but he has this responsibility to it, to look after it, and the law tells him what he must do to care for it.

We have the situation in Queensland where about sixty years ago, the Government passed an Act for the protection of

local Aborigines. Most Aborigines up there call it the 'Dog Act'. In effect, all Aborigines became wards of the State; they weren't allowed to do anything on their own responsibility. Usually before they took a new job, they had to get permission from the local Protector of Aborigines; and this was normally the local policeman, with all that that implies. They weren't even allowed to collect their own wages, it was banked for them, such as it was, and if they wanted their own money they had to go and ask for some, and then it was up to the protector to dole out however much he thought they ought to have. Of course the intention was good, it was to stop people exploting them, but it often worked quite the other way, depending on the character of the person in authority.

Those people who were irretrievably tribal in outlook were sort of swept under the carpet, so to speak. Small areas were set aside as reserves and the people were collected, irrespective of their tribal area and what they considered to be their sacred responsibilities, and sent to these areas. Some, especially the older people, were so distressed that they died, actually died. But the reserves were established, and a new generation grew up on these reserves. The unfortunate thing was that the Government retained the ownership of the reserves, they remained Crown land, and in recent years have even taken back reserves from the use of Aboriginal people to use as mineral development, especially around Cape York area.

The unfortunate thing about this is that with the re-settlement of the people who were living on these lost places, which they now regarded as their own country, some of them were actually re-settled in other places which were already occupied by tribal people they regarded as their

traditional enemies. Bamaga was one such site, where some folk were sent from Weipa. This has led to fighting and even killing. Once the people are severed from their country, they are lost; and they say the country is lost, too. Anyone writing about tribal people, especially for children, must never forget the fact about country and the relationship of tribal people to their own country; it is their life, very often, and cut off from it they can even wither and die.

I want to talk a little bit about the social system of tribal people, because it is in this area that many of the misconceptions held about Aborigines by white people exist. First we have to discuss the 'skin' relationship, because most of Aboriginal social relationships are determined by exactly this factor. Donald Thompson, who was a Research Fellow in Anthropology at Melbourne University in the 1950's, wrote talking about the need for identification by 'skin':

> This means that when a man knows the correct term of address he should use to any person, he also knows how he should behave and what his obligations are. It tells him which people he should treat with austerity and reserve, and vice versa; and also how they in turn will behave.

So 'skin' tells a man or a woman automatically what their relationship ought to be even if they are among strangers. It dictated social attitudes and much, much more; even to possible marriage relationships and the division of food among the group. One of the commonest criticisms of tribal Aborigines among early settlers, was that they often said - "The old men keep all the young girls for themselves, and the younger men are often forced to marry the middle-aged women the old men don't want!" It certainly looked like that to an uninformed

outsider. But of course, Aborigines didn't have insurance schemes or superannuation. Often, a middle-aged man would be promised a girl baby of the right skin relationship, by the father at birth. He then had responsibilities toward that girl. He had to help feed her, to protect her; all sorts of responsibilities. When she reached marriageable age, they would marry, and the older man would now have a young, strong wife who was physically capable of caring for him. She was his superannuation, so to speak. Also, it was considered fair that a middle-aged widow should marry a strong young man who could care for her properly, because both these schemes helped the group survive. It was a system that worked very well. This was all worked out through the 'skin' relationship. Another and most important part of the 'skin' relationship was genetic. It ensured that there was very little chance of in-breeding in a small community, and it worked very well, provided it was followed. For a people who had never heard of Gregor Mendel it worked very well, too.

Once one begins to realize the complexity of this relationship and its application to the law, then what is apparently a simple people becomes a complicated social order, and the punishment for breaking the taboos of that order were usually swift and direct. But I must tell you how lack of information can threaten something organised by white people that involves tribal Aborigines.

In 1980 there was a writer's workshop announced at the University of New England. The two consultants who were to head the workshop were two very talented women. When I saw in a journal that tribal people of both sexes were to be attending, I felt impelled to write immediately to the man organising the workshop. Fortunately, I knew him personally. I wrote and

said, "You have to have a senior white man there; there are things that women aren't allowed to discuss, just the same as there are things men aren't allowed to discuss." So I went down in a capacity of honorary white elder.

Well, the tribal people came, and as usual they were very shy. Before they could communicate properly with anyone they needed to know their relationship with us. What they very sensibly did was to form a council of four of the seniors of their number and arbitrarily assign 'skins' to the other members of the workshop. Once that point was settled we could then carry on.

This did have some entertainment value for some of the participants in the workshop, because one of the ladies who was running the show turned out now to be my sister-in-law, and the other could either be my aunt or my niece. She chose to be my niece!

No white man can easily understand this relationship business. Anthropologists have actually documented it, and the cross-relationships that are governed by it; but its importance in tribal life with all its complexities is very difficult to understand unless you are familar with it from childhood. But once you understand the importance of 'skin' relationships then you discover that much tribal law, the keeping of order, the responsibilities and privileges all follow, all flow on from that. Anyone who hopes to write about tribal Aborigines has to have some knowledge of 'skin'.

Now, I would like to talk a little about white people and their preconceptions about the Aboriginal people. Mostly this seems to be something like - "Aborigines? You see them drunk down in the park!" Well, sure, some of them are. There are also white men drunk in the park. The queue that forms

outside the Salvation Army hostels and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society refuges each evening contains people of all shades, but it seems to be the black ones that draw most attention. A sort of built-in reaction. How can this be changed? How can we hope people will see the whole picture? It must be changed. There is great hope among young people; I think our young people are remarkable in the way they have shed some of the prejudices of the previous generations. Some of it is merely fashionable, and collapses under stress, but much of it is genuine.

I do think that we can change white attitudes. I don't know if any work has been done on the subject of pre-conceived attitudes in Australia, but some work has been done in Los Angeles, at the University of California. At the first of a series of lectures on psychology there some years ago, there were a couple of deliberate items set up by the person running the course to illustrate lack of observation, and stereotyped ideas. During the first lecture in the series, all was peaceful, and the lecturer was droning away when suddenly the doors of the lecture theatre burst open and two men burst in, one pursuing the other. He chased him down the aisle and stabbed him savagely right in front of the students. The men were taken away, and the lecturer invited the students to describe the incident, in a paper. And I don't think many had noticed in the first place, when they wrote their description of the incident, that the 'stabbing' was actually done with a banana; though this piece of fruit was in view at all times. It was a stabbing as far as the students were concerned, and so it had to be done with a knife. This is one test of pre-conception at work. Another test that is also tried with students there, is to show them a film of two men struggling desperately, and one

of them is armed with a razor. One of the men is black, the other is white. The clip of film runs for ten seconds. Usually about ninety percent of the observers 'see' that it is the black man who has the razor, whereas in fact it is the other way around. I don't know of any such tests being run in Australia, but if you ask your friendly neighbourhood policeman about the powers of observation of people who witness a traffic accident or a crime, I think you will find that few people really see what is going on around them in any detail.

I think you will find that most Australians have many pre-conceived ideas about many things, and one of these things is, unfortunately, Aboriginal people. It is probably a composite, gained from books such as Walter (McVitty) was talking about last night; from the conversation of our parents who got most of it from the conversation of our grandparents. We have to get away from these things, to break away from it. I think it can be changed. It's very heartening to see among younger people. I have great faith that younger people will get away from this.

I have tried to talk about the Aborigine as a person rather than as a motif. I hope I have succeeded. I would like to leave you with the same quote Walter was kind enough to use last night, from an article I wrote for *Reading Time*.

> Perhaps the major thing the story has to say to young people, and in fact to all people is that the Aboriginal inhabitants of this country were men and women as we are; that they found joy and sorrow in the same things that move our hearts. They had their religion, their heroes, their dreams as we do. The land accommodated them as it accommodates us, as it will accommodate our successors and remain unaware of our passing.

> The land is impartial to the small things that crawl upon its surface. We must realise our kinship with our predecessors, certainly we could learn much from them, from the reverence and love they had for the land.

Thank you very much.

THE CHANGING SCENE: A LOOK AT ABORIGINALITY IN CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

MARGARET DUNKLE

In 1972 I wrote a paper entitled *Attitudes towards Aborigines in Current Australian Children's Literature*. It was limited to books then currently in print, and excluded non-fiction, such as text books and 'retellings of myths and legends' (remember this was before Dick Roughsey's picture books). I also excluded 'fantasy' because, if I remember rightly, the only story that came into that category was Frank Dalby Davison's *Children of the Dark People* (Durack's *The Way of the Whirlwind* was long out of print) and it didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the novels.

I ended up examining thirty eight titles (plus a few sequels). I looked at them from the standpoint of the way in which the Aboriginal characters were seen by the author. I looked for racial stereotypes (flashing white teeth, emphasis on skin colour, etc.), cultural stereotypes (witchetty grubs, walkabout, blacktracking, etc.) and stress on 'exotica', such as 'primitive' customs and superstitions. I wanted to see whether the author exhibited attitudes of hostility, derogation, paternalism, affinity, indignation, respect. I shall use the 1972 study as a starting point for this present paper, reorganizing and summarizing my earlier observations and extending them to include titles published in the intervening years. I have also included biographies except where these have been commissioned as a part of a publisher's non-fiction series.

Table I* lists the books discussed in 1972 (I have since found that I missed at least two titles). Table II lists the titles published since 1972 and in print at this writing. Tables III and IV separate Table I into two groups; titles

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* Tables can be found at the end of this paper.

that are now out of print and those that are still available. Tables V, VI and VII are Tables III, IV and II (in that order) rearranged to indicate the period in which the story takes place, and the relative importance of the Aboriginal characters. There is a separate category for 'Fantasy' including two titles from the 1972 list not identified as such.

For the purpose of this paper, Tables V, VI and VII are the important ones. If you look at Tables V and VI together you will see a number of 'changes' already becoming apparent. The first, not surprisingly, is date of publication; by 1981 most of the older titles have disappeared, the exceptions being the 'classics' (*A Little Black Princess* and the first of the *Billabong* series) and the two by Chauncy and Wrightson, heralds of things to come. The second notable point is the changing quality of the authors; the in-print list includes the established authors who still dominate the children's literature scene. The hack writers of potboilers - the 'Robinsonnades' and the 'Bush Westerns' - have all disappeared; and more importantly, if you look at Table VII, they have not been replaced. This indicates not only the general upgrading of children's literature as a whole, but also the changing concept of Aborigines. In Table V, sections I.C and II.C the Aboriginal minor characters are there for local colour; in the (then) contemporary stories they play the same role as Indians do in American Westerns; Keith sees them as romantic savages, Power as primitive 'myalls' and 'gins', Noonan as ignorant and superstition-ridden, and Aldous comments, through the medium of his Flying Doctor,

> Lazy lot most of them. Lounge around waiting for tourists to give 'em five bob for posing....That's the trouble with the abos. They have a lot of the white man's trappings but none of his outlook

> on life. No matter what may be done for them they remain tribal... (Aldous, 1960, 11-12)

Cilento writes of capsized boys befriended by a 'primitive' tribe who 'yabber' when they talk and whose eyes continually 'roll' in superstitious fright; she adds 'darky' and 'nigger' to the vocabulary. In the Chadwick books, Nanbaree is befriended by John and his family, rather like a friendly playful puppy; the same holds for the blind child in *Tiger in the Dark,* - 'Neza' in *Bush Christmas,* and Sal in *The Chinee Bird:* subservient, faithful, second class citizens. Carol Odell carries paternalism to its ultimate conclusion when 'Zarkie', rescued from mistreatment in a circus, proves his bravery and loyalty and is rewarded by an offer of adoption - which is pretty broadminded, since he never learns to put a coherent sentence together (neither does Neza, though he attends the same school as the other children) and continually carries his 'corroboree paint' around in a bag hung around his neck, in case he gets a sudden urge for war paint! Preston uses the stereotypic theme of children lost in the desert and a black-tracker brought in to find them, while *A Walk to the Hills of the Dreamtime* is remarkable for including the lot; it could well be used as a textbook example of romanticised racism. It is, essentially a reworking of the 1959 *Walkabout*, with all its faults intensified. Fred Baxter's unpretentious story is unusual in its lack of racism, a cheerful tale of a lost settler's child who is found by a group of Aboriginal kids and goes off with them, where they have great fun explaining each other's cultural patterns. *The River and the Road* is a serious study of a genuine friendship between a white and a tribal boy, and the tragic effects of white settlement; an analogy is drawn between colonial Australia and the Roman invasion of Britain.

1965 seems to have marked some sort of turning point; most of the books published before this date are typical of earlier adventure stories, while the later ones are beginning to portray Aboriginal characters as individuals, rather than objects. *The Lucky Stone* has the distinction of being the first story to have a contemporary Aboriginal child as the main character (and a girl at that!). It is also the first, and still the only one, to be written for younger readers, with an Aboriginal main character. Hill and Barlow (1978, 143) consider it contrived and paternalistic, and ridden with middle-class values; but to me Queie's homesickness when she leaves the camp for medical treatment, her love and longing for her grandmother, were very moving, and the cultural conflict all too real. *Spark of Opal* takes the first serious look at the life of Aborigines in an opal mining community, and the demoralization of the people she draws makes a grim picture, relentlessly documented. For Kathy and Steve, the only way out is assimilation; Steve is adopted out and plans to become a policeman, and Kathy decides to be a nursing aide, and help Sister look after the dark babies whose mothers are too drunk to feed them properly. Indignation and concern run high, and so does the paternalism.

Of all these stories, now out of print, the only one I truly regret losing is Pat Slater's *An Eagle for Pidgin*, still to my mind the best contemporary adventure to date. It is the story of an artist's family who move to the Kimberleys, and of the friendship that grows between young Ned and the Aboriginal boy Pidgin from the camp at the edge of town. But is is much more - a story of the many interwoven patterns in the cosmopolitan town of 'Weld' (read Broome), of falconry, bird smuggling, nature conservation, adventure, and much more. The

friendship between the two boys is seen in this larger context, and as it develops so do the perceptions of the reader - and no preaching is needed.

The three stories of invasion in which the main character is Aboriginal are inevitably tragic; I wonder if that is why they are all now out of print? Too painful to read? *The Courteous Savage* is the true story of Yagan of the Bibbulmun whose land bordered the Swan River, and of early friendship ending in dispossession and despair. *Mathinna's People* tells of the Tasmanian Aborigines, starting with a picture of tribal life and ending with the concentration camp on Flinders Island. It is Chauncy's second and last book about the Tasmanian People (*Tangara* was seven years earlier) written after painstaking research and with a kind of passionate awareness of the enormity of the tragedy - like Yagan's story only more so. It is painful reading, and difficult as well, for time was slipping away, and everything she had to say must go into these crowded pages.

There are no books in the equivalent section of Table VI; instead there are, for the first time, stories about contemporary urban young people. Melalla, in *Daughter of Two Worlds*, is best friends with the station manager's daughter, and later goes to school at a mission and thence to high school in Perth, where there are opportunities for endless discussions about race, prejudice, ambition, social patterns; didactic, yes, but Melalla is a real person, and the book is lively and thought-provoking in spite of its missionary zeal. A zeal shared by David Martin; but unfortunately *Hughie* is, like Kathy and Steve, merely a peg on which to hang the action. This is the first story to have a non-tribal hero, it is also David Martin's novel about racial prejudice, and Hughie cops

the lot. Worse, in Martin's zeal to include everything he actually reinforces some of the very stereotypes he decries; Hughie's first bark painting is an instinctive masterpiece, and there are bonepointings, blacktracking, and strange mystical powers.

If some of the minor characters in these books share the racist stereotypes of earlier writing - 'Cotton' in *Pastures of the Blue Crane,* for example, with his grinning 'teeth like tombstones' and 'legs like black clothes-props'; or the starving Nyabee, grovelling on the ground for the last scraps of the pumpkin pie thrown at him, or amusing the farm hands at night 'with caperings and sing-songs' in *Johnny Neptune* - there are more perceptive passages, such the fine scene in which the old tracker and his wives share their meagre desert hospitality, with grace and dignity, with the runaway Sylvie and her brother in *The Min-Min.* Or the two Aboriginal girls who help in the kitchen in the *Yamboorah* stories, with their 'quiet voices suited to the great Bush distances'. *The Switherby Pilgrims* includes the Aboriginal boy Cammy amongst the rest of the orphans, and although even Spence was unable to introduce him at this stage without the tell-tale grin and flashing teeth, thereafter he becomes an individual, with his own dignity and identity. *Come Back Peter* has the story of three boys (one Aboriginal), each facing his own personal crisis, brought together in an epic journey across the blazing desert; it is the Aboriginal child whose courage gets them through. Against their story runs the counterpoint of the memories of three old women; Paul's grandmother, Biddy the Irish housekeeper, and Sarah, their friend and contemporary from the camp on the river bank: Sarah whose 'soft curls... framed her soft brown face and brown eyes that had the limitless

distance in their depth and all the wisdom of the old people in their kindness....She was a tall lubra, as slim and elegant in her old age as she had been straight and graceful in her youth.' (Woodberry, 1968, 49). Woodberry, like Ottley, is writing from memories of real people in her own youth; Lark Rising and even rough Yamboorah are a long way from Billabong.

One of the earliest stories to have an elderly Aborigine as mentor to a white child is Thiele's *Storm Boy* of 1963. The boy learns all his bushcraft from Fingerbone Bill, who is the friend and equal of Storm Boy's father - except, again, for those flashing teeth, and a speech pattern that I think is supposed to be pidgin but has an oddly Germanic flavour; both I am sure subconscious stereotypes harking back perhaps to the very books Thiele himself devoured as a child.

Wrightson's *The Rocks of Honey* antedates *Storm Boy* by three years, and has old Uncle Tom who quietly and lovingly advises his nephew Eustace and also white Barney. This is a gem of a book, complex, sensitive, virtually flawless in its perceptivity. Take Eustace, for example, facing the hostile bush school on his first day:

> He was black, with thick wavy hair and very fine dark eyes set under heavy brows. Under the cold, searching gaze of the school he was shy and uneasy, and this shyness appeared like sulkiness. He had the slender hands, the slender body and the long thin legs of the true Australian. (Wrightson, 1960, 10)

Compare the 'black clothes-props'! Or again, as old Tom smiles at Barney it is

> The sort of smile that would call up an answer from a stone: a slow, wide pink and white smile that crinkled his cheeks and eyes; a smile full of kindness and dignity and secret laughter. (Wrightson, 1960, 20)

The Rocks of Honey was the first novel to present a contemporary Aboriginal child and his extended family interacting with a rural community; it is the kind of book Aboriginal children, in cities and country areas throughout Australia, need so badly. And Wrightson, typically, seems to be one of the few authors to sense this need.

Eustace is very close, in spirit, to Kath Walker as a child in *Stradbroke Dreamtime,* except that Kath even as a child was a rebel, choosing not to conform to the demands of the white man if she could help it: in school, like Eustace, cornered,

> The head teacher ordered me back to my seat and demanded to know why I had got up without permission. I couldn't explain. None of the white teachers would have understood. I just stared back at him, and he told me I was sullen and stubborn. (Walker, 72, 42)

She had got up to free a fly, trapped like herself in the prison of the schoolroom. This is still, apart from Dick Roughsey's picture books, the only story given to children by an Aboriginal author. The last half is Dreaming legends, which parallel the legend of the stone axe in *The Rocks of Honey*.

Six years after the regrettable 'Cotton', Brinsmead produced the marvellous Greenrush family living joyously on their waste land sandspit in *Listen to the Wind*. Bella the matriarch is a marvellously vital character, half Samoan and half Aboriginal (Brinsmead, romantic as ever, has her mother 'a princess of the Coodjingburra tribe'). Her instinct is sounder than her anthropology, for Bella is the de facto queen, not only of the sandspit but of the novel. There is rich living and high comedy (that rare and precious gift!) in this splendid story, and even - how daring can you get? - the promise of an interracial romance

One stereotype that I have always found particularly fascinating is Magical Powers. It is closely related to Instinctive Knowledge, and crops up in the old Bush Westerns frequently, often with a tribal Witch Doctor conducting a Bone Pointing ceremony (Bone Pointing is almost as popular as witchetty grubs and flashing white smiles). It achieves its ultimate absurdity - or highest development, depending on how you look at it - in two books in this section.

Throughout *To the Wild Sky*, Southall drops hints about a 'skeleton in the cupboard' (really; I am quoting) in the ancestry of beautiful, vivacious Carol; and all is revealed when the plane load of adolescents crashes on a deserted island. Everyone, of course (this being Southall) freaks out, and when they are in the last stages of disorganized hysteria Carol provides their salvation. How? She goes off by herself in the bush and lies down on the ground:

> She thought of dark men and dark women sleeping in the earth....She heard voices and sighs in the earth and bare feet padding the earth; not real feet, the feet of ghosts. (Southall, 1967, 164).

After that Carol knows exactly what to do. When next seen she is probing efficiently with a digging stick, with a pile of 'fruits and nuts and swollen roots' beside her. It is her Dark Blood, you see, lying dormant in that cupboard all these years.

Walkabout also starts with a plane wreck, this time somewhere in the northern desert. The two juvenile survivors are rescued by a 'bush boy' who has never seen whites before (he belongs to 'the Bindaboo, the most primitive and least-known of the Aboriginal groups') (Marshall, 1959, 55) whose 'lives were utterly uncomplicated because they were...dedicated in

their entirety to the waging of one battle: the battle with death' (26). The white boy envies his nakedness, and calls him 'Darkie' throughout; the girl is convinced he is going to rape her, and when he sees the fear in her eyes he becomes convinced that 'she had seen in his eyes an image: the image of the Spirit of Death' (54). The nonsense continues through 126 pages, a hotchpotch of the most incredible misinformation, animal, vegetable and mineral. In spite of the film of the book (which I am told is a considerable improvement) it is hard to see how this sexist, racist travesty could continue to be in print since 1959; yet it is now in its 18th Penguin reprinting, and continues to attract admiring comment from critics who surely should know better: the latest is an article in *Children's Literature in Education,* by David Rees, which has provoked Stella Lees into battle in an exchange of editorial letters; she has my wholehearted sympathy! At least her letters are being published.

The trends that became apparent in Table VI can be seen to continue in Table VII. There are no more 'bush westerns' or Robinsonnades, but instead Max Fatchen's marvellous yarns, in which Aboriginal characters interact with whites as equals, and in both of which an old, initiated man tips the balance between good and evil. In *The Fire in the Stone* Thiele has abandoned all stereotypes, and Willie Winnowie is beautifully drawn; the drunken people from the miserable camp are viewed with compassion and understanding through the eyes of Willie and his friend Ernie, whose father (white) is also shiftless and often drunk, and with less reason. When Willie is injured,

> In his heart Ernie knew what would be in the paper if Willie died. An inch of space on a back page....There would be bigger headlines for a dead racehorse. (Thiele, 73, 224)

David Martin, too, has outgrown stereotypes, and the minor character Rowena Miller is one of his most brilliant, a strong, humourous woman who hides Griff's father from the police, soul sister to Bella Greenrush. *Night of the Mutton Birds* carries on from *An Eagle for Pidgin*; a story about conservation, it is also, almost incidentally, the story of a boy's first experience of the wider world beyond his safe home island, and of prejudice and alienation. Mavis Thorpe Clark has written the first biography of a present day Aborigine, and it is respectful, warm, insightful, and without paternalism. Thomas Roy's novels of station life, set at the time of 'Yamboorah' and 'Lark Rising', have the station owner's son and his tribal friend Tajurra mates and equals; the prejudice comes from white characters, and is seen for what it is. *Manganinnie* tells again the story of the genocide of the Tasmanian people, and does it far more successfully than *Mathinna's People* because the old woman is so vibrantly alive, you see the loved and lovely world so clearly through her lonely eyes. *Bush Christmas* is a fascinating example of what can be done with racist literature; the entire book has been skilfully rewritten and has become a good, enjoyable (if dated) adventure story. Even *This Child*, the one truly racist book on the list, is in a way a step forward, for like Clark's earlier *Spark of Opal* the paternalism is born of indignation, of seeing the appalling conditions of many fringe dwellers in country areas, and of the belief that they have lost so much that assimilation is the only answer; it is the result not of callous indifference, but of the white author's lack of understanding. The little book, *Captain Pickles and the 'Wandering Jane'*, edited by Peter Dargin is to me one of the most interesting of all, because it breaks totally new ground. The story is insignificant, but it is

designed specifically for younger, less able readers, it is inviting, beautifully illustrated, and the characters include an Aboriginal boy as a natural and normal member of the crew. It is, I profoundly hope, an indication of better things to come, for this is the level that has so far been totally ignored: we still have nothing for younger or poorer readers, about young people living in towns and cities and closely settled rural areas; where most Aboriginal children are.

A thread of mysticism, of spiritual oneness with the earth and everything about it, visible and invisible, physical and spiritual, runs through the Aboriginal experience. It crops up, debased and misunderstood, in those bonepointing 'witch doctors', and the terrible travesties of the two J.V. Marshalls. There is a clear glimpse of it in Fatchen's strong old men, in the tribal councils at Roy's Oonaderra, in Chauncy's stories and *Manganinnie*. But it is only fully realized, fully visible, in the work of Bill Scott and Patricia Wrightson. Bill Scott, whose Hero walked when the earth was new, at the end of the Dreaming; and Patricia Wrightson, whose Hero must cope with <u>us</u>, and the mess we have made of the land that was his heritage; the two come full circle, and between them embrace the world, and all meaningful human experience. To me Boori and Wirrun are the highest achievements to date in Australian children's literature. They speak of a world view that could not, now, come from any other country, and they offer hope that it still may not be, perhaps, too late. We who put things in boxes can call them high fantasy, or myth and legend, or adventure, or whatever; for myself, I think of them, like poetry, as having an inner truth deeper than the imagery of words. I feel myself quite inadequate to play the role of critic for these authors, I can only recommend them to you, to experience for yourselves.

AN EXAMINATION OF SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF ABORIGINALITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

MARGARET DUNKLE

TABLE 1. TITLES IN PRINT IN 1972

Author	Title	Pub.	Date
Aldous, Allan	*Doctor with Wings*	Brockhampton	1960
Baxter, Fred	*Snake for Supper*	Lansdowne	1968
Brinsmead, Hesba	*Listen to the Wind*	Oxford	1970
Brinsmead, Hesba	*Pastures of the Blue Crane*	Oxford	1964
Bruce, Mary Grant	*A Little Bush Maid* (sequels)	Ward Lock	1910
Chadwick, Doris	*John of Sydney Cove, John and Nanbaree*	Nelson	1957,1962
Chauncy, Nan	*Mathinna's People*	Oxford	1967
Chauncy, Nan	*Tangara*	Oxford	1960
Cilento, Ruth	*Moreton Bay Adventure*	Michael Joseph	1961
Clark, Mavis Thorpe	*The Min-Min*	Lansdowne	1966
Clark, Mavis Thorpe	*Spark of Opal*	Lansdowne	1968
Donkin, Nance	*Johnny Neptune*	A & R	1971
Durack, Mary	*The Courteous Savage*	Nelson	1964
Gunn, Mrs Aeneas	*The Little Black Princess*	A & R	1905
Ingamells, Rex	*Aranda Boy*	Longman	1952
Keith, James	*The Scuba Buccaneers*	A & R	1966
Kiddle, Margaret	*West of Sunset*	Melb.Uni. Press	1961
Marshall, James Vance	*Walkabout*	Michael Joseph	1959
Marshall, J.V.(pseud.)	*A Walk to the Hills of the Dreamtime*	Hodder & Stoughton	1970
Martin, David	*Hughie*	Nelson	1971
Noonan, Michael	*Flying Doctor on the Great Barrier Reef*	Hodder	1962
O'Connor, Elizabeth	*The Chinee Bird*	Ure Smith	1966
Odell, Carol	*Jimmy Hurley to the Rescue*	A & R	1965

Oldfield, Pamela	*Daughter of Two Worlds*	Rigby	1970
Ottley, Reginald	*By the Sandhills of Yamboorah*	Deutsch	1967
Patchett, M.E.	*Tiger in the Dark*	Brockhampton	1960
Preston, James	*Jeedarra Country*	Rigby	1971
Power, Phyllis M.	*Nursing in the Outback*	Blackie	1959
Sammon, Stella	*The Lucky Stone*	Methuen	1969
Slater, Pat	*An Eagle for Pidgin*	Jacaranda	1970
Smart, Ralph and M.C. Borer	*Bush Christmas* (1)	Pitman	1947
Southall, Ivan	*To the Wild Sky*	A & R	1967
Spence, Eleanor	*The Switherby Pilgrims*, *Jamberoo Road*	Oxford	1967,1969
Thiele, Colin	*Storm Boy*	Rigby	1963
Walker, Kath	*Stradbroke Dreamtime*	A & R	1972
Woodberry, Joan	*Come Back Peter*	Rigby	1968
Wright, Judith	*The River and the Road*	Lansdowne	1966
Wrightson, Patricia	*The Rocks of Honey*	A & R	1960

TABLE II. TITLES PUBLISHED 1973-1981, IN PRINT 1981

Clark, Mavis Thorpe	*The Boy from Cumeroogunga*	Hodder	1979
Dargin, Peter (ed.)	*Captain Pickles and the 'Wandering Jane'*	Jacaranda	1981
Fatchen, Max	*Chase Through the Night*	Methuen	1976
Fatchen, Max	*The Spirit Wind*	Methuen	1973
Hawkins, Alice	*This Child*	Cassell	1976
Martin, David	*The Man in the Red Turban*	Hutchinson	1978
Price, Pat Peatfield	*The Hills of the Black Cockatoos*	Puffin	1981
Roberts, Beth	*Manganinnie*	Macmillan Sun Books	1979 1980

Roy, Thomas	*The Curse of the Turtle*, *The Vengeance of the Dolphin*	Bodley Head	1977,1980
Scott, Bill	*Boori, Darkness under the Hills*	Oxford	1978,1980
Small, Mary	*The Night of the Mutton Birds*	Methuen	1981
Smart, R. & M.C. Borer	*Bush Christmas* (2)	Pitman	1980
Thiele, Colin	*The Fire in the Stone*	Rigby	1973
Wrightson, Patricia	*The Ice is Coming*, *The Dark Bright Water*	Hutchinson	1977,1978

TABLE III. TITLES FROM 1972 LIST OUT OF PRINT 1981

Aldous, Allan	*Doctor with Wings*
Baxter, Fred	*Snake for Supper*
Chadwick, Doris	*John of Sydney Cove*, *John and Nanbaree*
Chauncy, Nan	*Mathinna's People*
Cilento, Ruth	*Moreton Bay Adventure*
Clark, Mavis Thorpe	*Spark of Opal*
Durack, Mary	*The Courteous Savage*
Ingamells, Rex	*Aranda Boy*
Keith, James	*The Scuba Buccaneers*
Kiddle, Margaret	*West of Sunset*
Marshall, J.V.(psued.)	*A Walk to the Hills of the Dreamtime*
Noonan, Michael	*Flying Doctor on the Great Barrier Reef*
O'Connor, Elizabeth	*The Chinee Bird*
Odell, Carol	*Jimmy Hurley to the Rescue*
Patchett, M.E.	*Tiger in the Dark*
Preston, James	*Jeedarra Country*
Power, Phyllis M.	*Nursing in the Outback*
Sammon, Stella	*The Lucky Stone*

Slater, Pat	*An Eagle for Pidgin*
Smart, R. & M.C. Borer	*Bush Christmas*
Wright, Judith	*The River and the Road*

TABLE IV. TITLES FROM 1972 LIST IN PRINT 1981

Brinsmead, Hesba	*Listen to the Wind*
Brinsmead, Hesba	*Pastures of the Blue Crane*
Bruce, Mary Grant	*A Little Bush Maid* (sequels)
Chauncy, Nan	*Tangara*
Clar, Mavis Thorpe	*The Min-Min*
Donkin, Nance	*Johnny Neptune*
Gunn, Mrs Aeneas	*A Little Black Princess*
Marshall, James Vance	*Walkabout*
Martin, David	*Hughie*
Oldfield, Pamela	*Daughter of Two Worlds*
Ottley, Reginald	*By the Sandhills of Yamboorah*
Southall, Ivan	*To the Wild Sky*
Spence, Eleanor	*The Switherby Pilgrims*
Thiele, Colin	*Storm Boy*
Walker, Kath	*Stradbroke Dreamtime*
Woodberry, Joan	*Come Back Peter*
Wrightson, Patricia	*The Rocks of Honey*

TABLE V. CLASSIFIED LIST OF TITLES FROM 1972 LIST OUT OF PRINT 1981

I. Historical (Early Contact)

A. Aboriginal Main Character

Chauncy, N.	*Mathinna's People*	1967
Durack, M.	*The Courteous Savage*	1964
Ingamells, R.	*Aranda Boy*	1952

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Baxter, F.	*Snake for Supper*	
Chadwick, D.	*John of Sydney Cove* (sequel)	1957,1962
Cilento, R.	*Moreton Bay Adventure*	1961
Wright, J.	*The River and the Road*	1966

C. Aboriginal Minor Character(s)

Kiddle, M.	*West of Sunset*	1961

II. Contemporary

A. Aboriginal Main Character(s)

Marshall, J.V.(pseud.)	*A Walk to the Hills of Dreamtime*	1970
Sammon, S.	*The Lucky Stone*	1969

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Clark, M.T.	*Spark of Opal*	1968
O'Connor, E.	*The Chinee Bird*	1966
Odell, C.	*Jimmy Hurley to the Rescue*	1965
Patchett, M.E.	*Tiger in the Dark*	1960
Preston, J.	*Jeedarra Country*	1971
Slater, P.	*An Eagle for Pidgin*	1970
Smart, R.	*Bush Christmas* (1)	1947

C. Aboriginal Minor Character(s)

Aldous, A.	*Doctor with Wings*	1960
Keith, J.	*The Scuba Buccaneers*	1966
Noonan, M.	*Flying Doctor....*	1962
Power, P.M.	*Nursing in the Outback*	1959

TABLE VI. CLASSIFIED LIST OF TITLES FROM 1972 LIST IN PRINT 1981

I. Historical (Early Contact)

A. Aboriginal Main Character: No title

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Gunn, Mrs A.	*A Little Black Princess*	1905
Spence, E.	*The Switherby Pilgrims*	1967

C. Aboriginal Minor Characters(s)

Donkin, N.	*Johnny Neptune*	1971

II. Historical (Early 20th Century)

A. Aboriginal Main Character

Walker, Kath	*Stradbroke Dreamtime*	1972

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Woodberry, J.	*Come Back Peter*	1968

C. Aboriginal Minor Character(s)

Bruce, M.G.	*A Little Bush Maid*	1910
Ottley, R.	*By the Sandhills of Yamboorah*	1967

III. Contemporary

A. Aboriginal Main Character

Martin, D.	*Hughie*	1971
Oldfield, P.	*Daughter of Two Worlds*	1970

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Brinsmead, H.F.	*Listen to the Wind*	1970
Marshall, J.V.	*Walkabout*	1959
Southall, I.	*To the Wild Sky*	1967
Thiele, C.	*Storm Boy*	1963

C. Aboriginal Minor Character(s)

Brinsmead, H.F.	*Pastures of the Blue Crane*	1964
Clark, M.T.	*The Min-Min*	1966

IV. Fantasy

A. Aboriginal Main Character: no title

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Chauncy, N.	*Tangara*	1960
Wrightson, P.	*The Rocks of Honey*	1960

TABLE VII. CLASSIFIED LIST OF TITLES PUBLISHED 1973-1981, IN PRINT 1981

I. Historical (Pre-Invasion)

Scott, B.	*Boori, Darkness under the Hills*	1978,1980

II. Historical (Early Contact)

Aboriginal Main Character(s)

Roberts, B.	*Manganannie*	1979
Price, P.P.	*The Hills of the Black Cockatoos*	1981

III. Historical (Early 20th Century)

A. Aboriginal Main Character(s)

Clark, M.T.	*The Boy from Cumeroogunga*	1979

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Fatchen, M.	*The Spirit Wind*	1973
Roy, T.	*The Curse of the Turtle, The Vengeance of the Dolphin*	1977,1980

C. Aboriginal Minor Character(s)

Dargin, P.	*Captain Pickles and the 'Wandering Jane'*	1981
Martin, D.	*The Man in the Red Turban*	1978

IV. Contemporary

A. Aboriginal Main Character(s)

Hawkins, A.	*This Child*	1976
Small, M.	*Night of the Mutton Birds*	1981

B. Aboriginal Major Character(s)

Fatchen, M.	*Chase through the Night*	1976
Smart, R.	*Bush Christmas* (2)	1980
Thiele, C.	*The Fire in the Stone*	1973

V. Fantasy

Aboriginal Main Character

Wrightson, P.	*The Ice is Coming, The Dark Bright Water*	1977,1978

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A DISCUSSION OF THE MAKING OF THE FILM *"MANGANINNIE"*.

JOHN HONEY

I feel like an interloper on a couple of counts. First of all a film isn't strictly speaking literature, and since this is a seminar on the Aboriginal motif in children's literature, the fact that I don't really see the film *"Manganinnie"* as a children's film essentially, is the second count. However, the film does seem to work well for kids and also adolescents, so we will allow the question to beg itself and come round to the idea of the Aboriginal motif in *"Manganinnie"* which I have been struggling with for a week now. What is an Aboriginal motif? Motif, 'dominant idea'. *"Manganinnie"* is Aboriginal, certainly in its intention and its content. Now the main reason I feel like an interloper is that I can only really talk about the film and the film comes from the book, and I wonder how many of you in the audience, in answer to the classic question would say, 'No, but I saw the movie'. I would like to relate back, to start with, to the book, because one of my abiding interests in the couple of years before the film was actually made was the process of taking what Beth Roberts had written in the book and translating it into screen terms, which was a most complex and interesting task.

Now to refer again to the Aboriginal motif in *"Manganinnie"* or more satisfactorily from my point of view, the content of *"Manganinnie"* as a representation, a fictional representation, of the Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. The first things that struck me when I read Beth's book were to do with the fact that she demonstrated an extreme concern to represent fairly and with dignity, to the best of her ability, and to the ability of her very thorough research, the culture of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, and to represent in as fully

realised fictional way as possible, an idea of what life would have been like and how a representative of that culture would have operated. Beth's concerns for the use of language for example, stand out. Her thoroughness, the use of Tasmanian Aboriginal words in the text, her treatment of religion and culture, technology, bush-craft and what Beth has referred to in the book, (I think, most interestingly,) as 'common knowledge', are the things that really struck me most, as well as the sensistivity with which these things are realised. I would like to take the liberty, and I have Beth's permission to do this, to read a couple of extracts from the book which I hope will give some indication of what I am talking about. I do not want to classify these too much but the first one I would like to read is to do with representation of religion or spiritual life,

> a strange noise in the bullrushes startled Manganinnie. Looking beyond *Mintan* she saw fronds moving and very soon something rose up in front of her. It was the great *Droemerdeene* himself. Of all the ancestral spirits he was the most important. The silver and gold light of the full moon shone on him as he came towards her in huge graceful bounds. Manganinnie sat in a trance, *Droemerdeene* was beautiful! He had the head of one of her people and the body of *larner* the kangaroo and his eyes shone brighter than the stars. In a gentle, sing song voice he spoke. (Roberts, 1979, p.27)

I won't go on with that, but the tone I think is important. Certainly it was important to me from the point of view of the task that I faced as the script editor, whose job it was going to be to come up with a screen play that represented the spirit

and the feeling of this particular work, because for screen play adaptation, this work has considerable problems. Mainly to do with the rendering of language, to do with the fact that it involves virtually only two people and that there is relatively little action in the book of the kind that cinema audiences demand if they are sitting for ninety minutes to watch a feature film.

I will go on with another couple of examples from the book, this one to do with culture.

> Manganinnie was at a loss to explain. Tonytah was so young. [Tonytah is Joanna incidentally.] She still knew so little about the language and customs of the people. She smiled at her child and started to tell the story about fish. 'Once upon a time', she began, '*Droemerdeene's* People ate lots of fish like this, but many, many Moons ago the Ancestral Fish came out of the Sky and spoke to the Chiefs. He gave them special Sacred Knowledge that could not be shared and from that time it became the Law never to eat fish with scales. However, *noonyer* the crayfish, *tateyter* the yabbi and *loonner* the oyster and all the little limpets can still be eaten.' Manganinnie had never given much thought to this Law because her People accepted the Law without question. *Droemerdeene*, the southern star, was possibly the only one left who really knew the reason. Manganinnie loved teaching, but sometimes it was difficult without all the facts. (83)

Which is a difficulty I think we all shared in the process of putting "*Manganinnie*" together, of being without all the facts. We certainly faced it as a production team when we had to realise and flesh out the content of the film. I would like to point out strongly at the beginning that "*Manganinnie*" is not a documentary, nor is it a piece of anthropology. It is a

piece of fiction which is based loosely on certain historical events and extended with license outside its immediate historical reference.

What I'd like to do now is simply treat a couple of classifications of what I have been talking about and relate the problem of rendering Beth's work on to the screen to those. First of all, the biggest difficulty that I faced was finding a writer who would be able to detect the spirit in Beth's work and to keep faith with it, put it on the screen, and also be sensitive to the Aboriginal issues that were raised in the process. Ken Kelso was contracted to become the screen writer but Ken had a lot of soul searching to do before he actually agreed to undertake this work. That soul searching was based on his willingness as a European to involve himself in fleshing out and in creating what he saw as Aboriginal subject matter. It actually took a lot of convincing on my part to get Ken to go ahead and to trust his judgment and his ability to carry that very difficult task out while retaining as much cultural integrity as we could give the process. It is a very ticklish area. It is something I hadn't really thought through before I became confronted with it, and it was a problem that I had to address myself to right through the making of the film. And one of the specific ways in which that problem arose was in the use of language, the linguistic communication, and in difficulties that arise when you are making a film for audiences that speak English, a film which is to do principally with a woman from a society that doesn't speak English.

A great deal of what Beth writes in her book is a sort of third-person interior monologue, which renders what is actually going on in Manganinnie's head. The exposition of the culture is largely achieved that way. The problem that I

faced was to decide whether to try and directly translate the sort of technique that Beth was using on to the screen, which would have meant having a voice which was Manganinnie's voice speaking in English, giving her innermost thoughts. But that's a verbal way of doing things and what I preferred to do was to attempt to overcome the problem in a visual and action based kind of way by providing incident which could raise the sort of points that Beth raises in her narrative through action. But that didn't answer the problem of how Manganinnie should speak. Should she speak in the old movie conventions of broken English, like German army officers in World War II films? I thought about that and didn't like the idea very much. The possibility of her speaking in a sort of reconstructed Tasmanian dialect was also a consideration, with perhaps sub-titles. There were great problems in that, but it wasn't dismissed until very late in the process. In fact, as part of the screen writing process Ken did in fact write a sort of Tasmanian dialect for Manganinnie's dialogue.

At that stage we hadn't cast Manganinnie and we didn't really know how we were going to overcome the probem of putting somebody in that part. So that option was left open. There was also the possibility of finding a tribal Aboriginal person and using their own language, which is obviously what we ended up doing, and filling in the gaps which we couldn't make clear through action and through the capacity of the person playing Manganinnie to communicate, with a voice from Joanna later in life recounting the story. So we couldn't really make a final decision on this until we cast Manganinnie. It was getting pretty late in the piece, we had raised the money for the film, we knew when we were going to shoot, we still hadn't cast, we had about three months to do that in and it became obvious that we would have to really try and find somebody who was 'bush-

wise', who could behave properly in the bush and be convincingly tribal. So I went on a sort of Australia-wide safari looking for Manganinnie. I talked to urban Aboriginal people in Sydney. I got a great deal of help from Bob Maza from the Aboroginal and Islanders Dance Company. But I couldn't really find anyone in Sydney who was physically convincing. Then we enlisted the aid of the Aboriginal Artists Agency in Sydney and with the help of an extraordinary man called Anthony Wallace I went to the Northern Territory to try and find Manganinnie and was lucky enough to find Mawayul Yanthalawuy.

Mawayul teaches in a pre-school in the Bagot Reserve in the middle of Darwin but she is a tribal Aborigine. She lived for the first thirty years of her life in a tribal situation on Elcho Island and so she solved some of the problems for us in the sense that she can speak English very well, she has contact with Europeans, (her husband is in fact a European) but she is still a tribal person. When we found her and decided that she was the person to do the part, it became obvious to me that we could not impose on her a reconstructed Tasmanian dialect and expect her to render that naturally. I was going to be asking a tremendous amount of her as a performer anyway, and to impose this great difficulty on her, which would be similar to somebody in this audience who had never acted before being asked to perform in Russian without ever having heard anybody speak the language, would be too much. So I thought right, well 99.99, recurring, percent of the audience who see the film will not know whether the dialect being used is a Tasmanian dialect or a Northern Australian Tribal dialect and so I made that decision and was able, fortunately, to leave a great deal of the Aboriginal content of the picture to Mawayul herself. I was able to use

her advice about the way she would behave in certain circumstances, and about the sorts of things she would be likely to do.

Mawayul had immense physical skills which helped enormously, a lot of which I didn't discover until we were confronted with the need to use them. For example the canoe, which physically looks as much like a Tasmanian Aboriginal canoe as we could possibly make one, from the visual references we had access to, but it floats better than they did because it's polystyrene under the bark. We didn't have an opportunity to put it in the water and to put Mawayul and the dog and Joanna in it before the day we were actually shooting the scene, so we went to great trouble to have people just out of shot in the water to try and help with handling and if any problems arose or to rescue anybody who was tipped in the water. Mawayul got in the canoe and off she went and it turned out she had been the junior canoe champion of Elcho Island in her youth so there was no problem. She was also an expert tree climber and so a great many of the physical difficulties that we could have been confronted with in using somebody who wasn't used to behaving in the bush were overcome by Mawayul's own personal skills.

To go on from the language and to relate back to one of the other main thrusts of what Beth achieves in the book, that is the feeling of constant spiritual presence as an innate part of life. We wanted to create a similar feeling of spiritual content in the landscape, something that wasn't divided off and compartmentalised as our religious experience for those who believe in things religious, seems to be in this society. Some of the ways in which we approached the problem were to have certain incidents - like the storm in the cave where

the vague form appears - which are not really explained away and not pinned down. It also happens on the island when Joanna pulls the skull from the grass mound. There is tremendous license taken in those and there is probably a tremendous arrogance in taking that license, but the arrogance is not intended. The intention is to try and build up a fictionalized but comprehensive spiritual environment which this Aboriginal woman, Manganinnie, is part of. It expresses itself also in the use of the voices of her tribe which recurr on the soundtrack from time to time. Little devices of that kind. I don't know whether the film, because I am still too close to it, is as successful in building up a very real and tangible spiritual world as the book is. I would like to think it works, but that's for audiences to decide.

The question of culture again came back to the use of Mawayul's own culture to a considerable extent. I just read the little extract, the story of the scale fish. In the film Manganinnie tells the story of the fish and the moon. It's not a Tasmanian story, it's one of Mawayul's own tribal stories, but in terms of the fictionalized world that we are building up I think that is fair enough. Again it's an arrogance, a cultural intrusion, a cultural distortion, but overall I think it works as part of this fictionalized as opposed to documentary world. So what we are left with is a finished film, that is not a piece of anthropology, not a documentary, not a dramatised version of the last Tasmanian. I hope from my point of view as Director of the film that it has a universal and symbolic application. An interesting point is that so far it seems to have been more readily received by European countries than it has by mass audiences in Australia. It's not surprising to me, in fact it is one of the things I thought would probably

happen, but it is interesting that it has happened. The reasons for that I think one can ponder on for a long time, and they are well worth the pondering.

REFERENCE

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ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN: THE ABORIGINAL MOTIF

ROSALIND LANGFORD

Ladies and gentlemen I would like to thank the organisers of this seminar for inviting me to speak to you today on the subject of writing for children. The Aboriginal motif, to me means a recurring theme. The recurring theme that is constantly popping its ugly head up in childrens' books is racism in Australian literature. And this is the subject that my paper is presenting to you today. I hope what I have to say to you may in some small way go towards correcting the situation.

How much so would attitudes have been changed if the history books and stories we read as children had been written by Aboriginal historians and Aboriginal writers? The history of Australia was recorded through European eyes and therefore biased in that manner. If however there had been an Aboriginal recording of history as well, it could be argued that it would naturally have been biased to the Aboriginal point of view. But at least the two points of view may have presented a balance.

It has been said that 'text books', unlike a person, have no right to be wrong. More so I believe when writing for children. Yet the majority of Australian books on Aborigines perpetuate racism and are factually inaccurate. How much is written for the young child about settlements in Australia before Captain Cook? How many books give detailed recordings that the Aboriginal people discovered Australia? Detailed histories of Australia have been published which do not so much as mention them unless it is a fleeting reference in which they are classified with the fauna.

Innumerable history books for children of all ages give a one-sided account of early race relations in Australia and yet most of these books are being read and are part of our

school education system. Racially biased and inaccurate text books cannot be considered suitable teaching material and should not find their way into the schools. But however, such books are reaching the schools where our young people are being educated thus forming part of their basic beliefs and contributing towards the developing of racist attitudes in the young.

The market is flooded and is over-whelmed by Aboriginal literature which is written by non-Aborigines which presents their case from too often a biased point of view. I believe it is only just that more Aborigines are encouraged to contribute in the field of literature so as to present a broader and more balanced point of view. In fact it has persistently and relentlessly acted to denigrate everything that is Aboriginal. If a student had access to more information from Aboriginal writers I believe he could make a more balanced and better informed judgment in such matters as Aboriginal Land Rights, identity, remedial education, legal requirements, religion and philosophies.

In fact we mainly hear about only the difficulties that beset the Aboriginal people. What is said of how many of our people were killed by the white settlers, of the resistance we put up against our land being taken over and that the resistance still continues?

What we are really finding is that we are in a vicious circle, books are reaffirming the superiority of the white people, to the young mind. Parents, teachers and others buy these books to convey information to the child, because they conform with their knowledge and understanding of the geographical and historical situation as the adult understands it. This information is then regurgitated in the classrooms of Australia.

So the child grows up knowing nothing of the diversity of the Aboriginal culture and its religion. They are told very little or nothing at all of the elements of life which go to make up the Aboriginal's individual or group existence. One of the major problems is that a majority of text books in use throughout Australian schools put forward the proposition that to be Aborigine one must be a tribal Aborigine. This does not reflect reality which is, that many Aborigines in Australia are de-tribalised and may even hold such diverse jobs as politicians and,dare I say it,librarians.

The knowledge of the history of our people is important but it should not stop there. Children at school should be made more aware of the situation of Aboriginal people today, of our hopes, of our aspirations and the things we are struggling to achieve and the reasons why. But how can this be done when the text books and the education material on Tasmanian Aborigines. stops at Truganini saying she was the last Tasmanian Aboriginal. Should not the story continue? These pathetic untruths are even taught to our own Aboriginal children here in Tasmania and the rest of Australia. Here is an excellent example of what is taught to children and how their thinking is indoctrinated by what they are taught. I quote a young Aboriginal child in South Australia on writing about Aborigines in Tasmania for tne book *The Aboriginal Children's History of Australia* ... writes:

> Once upon a time there were some Aboriginals. They lived in Tasmania. Then white men came to live in the Aboriginal's land. They took over the land and treated the Aboriginal's very badly. The Aboriginals were killed. Those who were left fought back and the white man got lots of soldiers and made the Black Line. The

> soldiers were a short distance apart and they marched across Tasmania hunting the Aboriginals to Flinders Island. They were put in houses and they were given pots, pans, plates and beds but they didn't know what they were. They did not like these things. They wanted to go back home but they couldn't. It wasn't long before homesickness and disease caused some deaths. They died because they could not get back to Tasmania. In a very short time there were only a few survivors. These were finally returned to Tasmania where the last to die was Truganini. Truganini was the LAST TASMANIAN ABORIGINAL. She wanted her bones burnt and thrown away in the sea. In 1976 they did it.

The education system does very little to encourage the development of self-esteem amongst Aboriginal children, by teaching such untruths. We have Aboriginal children in Tasmania reading such untruths then having to defend themselves against their peers and some teachers that they are Tasmanian Aboriginals.

The use of out-dated racist text books and unsympathetic teachers attitudes towards the problems that the Aboriginal child faces help ensure that the educational outcome amongst Aborigines is a national disgrace. I repeat, the attitudes persist amongst many teachers that, to be Aborigine one must be tribal Aborigine and a majority of books reinforce this attitude. Aboriginal people should have their rights respected by being called Aborigine rather than such derogatory terms as half-casts, descendants and coloureds. On this point I'd like to digress for a moment back to my own childhood, when I can remember my own parents who were very dark skinned: they would be quite affronted to be called blacks because it was used in a derogatory term such as DIRTY BLACK. The acceptable term to them was "coloured folk". Nowadays however it would be considered by Aborigines to be paternalistic to address us as coloured folk. We prefer the "tell it as it is" approach and be called blacks. This situation really is an example of a

greater overall problem of the search for the Aboriginal identity. After white settlement Aborigines were put down to such a degree that the effects are still felt today where we have many Aborigines who suffer inferiority complexes and are still searching for their identity. Which gets us back to the point that racist literature given to them as children has compounded the problem. In other words racist literature not only affects non-Aboriginal children by fostering racist attitudes but it continues to stifle the development of modern day Aborigines. Some racist attitudes that carry over to the young must be blamed on what I call the unscientific section of the scientific community. I refer to some of the unenlightened anthropologists and archeologists whose conclusions were based on theories developed from a body of knowledge developed on a racist philosophy, (which I believe to be without any scientific foundations).

Let me cite an hypothetical example of a student reading a text book stating that the Aborigine was inferior genetically and perhaps could be the missing link and a relic of man's primitive evolutionary past. Not only has this been established as being unfounded but it demonstrates the lack of intelligence of those over educated but naive and simple pseudo-scientists. In fact I would like to share with you experiences I share with some of my fellow Aborigines. We believe in common with some of the white population and the more intelligent in the educated and scientific field that mankind came from a common root stock and all races are born equal and have the same potential. Perhaps the ancestors of these particular psuedo scientists may have swung through the trees. BUT MINE DID NOT. (Look around and say I hope we haven't anybody here who has a large forehead and eyebrows close together - perhaps they might be

dubbed as missing links). Yet outdated text books with these outdated theories are still being read and used as research materials with the young. In 1973, when the then Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs, commissioned research on text books on race currently in classroom usage, the report was devastating, showing as it did, that a large amount of inaccurate and overly biased material was in daily use in schools everywhere. These racist and outdated books should be taken off the shelves and not be seen ever again by the young children.

To sum up, the effects of racism in literature as given to school children can be likened to the tentacles of an octopus, its effects reach far and wide in many directions to the detriment of both non-Aborigines and Aborigines themselves, who, I believe, have the right to establish their rightful place in a multi cultural Australia. There is now no excuse for producing text books likely to perpetuate racism and misinformation, since there are a variety of specialised educational bodies ready to assist and advise. I believe Aborigines are eager to take up the challenge. With the support of publishers they would be only too willing to write, edit or monitor text books on our race so that our side of the story may at last be presented adequately, with feeling and with accuracy.

WHY ABORIGINES SHOULD BE WRITING FOR CHILDREN

JIM EVERETT

A DREAMTIME

Schools teach from text of things not true,
of Tasmanian Aboriginals.
Teach lies about the blackman's life,
the present day originals.
We're here! we cry to no avail,
the whites won't recognize us.
You're only mixed bloods, is the reply,
don't make any fuss.

But pen from paper, books from sight,
exemption from the rule.
We're looked on as inferior,
and called abo's out of school.
They'll call us Blacks and treat us slight,
deny our rights forever.
To hide the fact that we're still here,
is all they do endeavour.

Time will tell, the future's ours,
we'll see a day of justice.
Non-Aboriginals taught the truth,
a part of our solace.
A dream of times we'll never see,
whites just won't allow it.
So fight it is 'til time does end,
for us, it is writ.

Jim Everett.

Credibility of writers

It is common knowledge that literature concerning Aborigines is mainly a product of non-Aboriginal writers. Almost all written work, to be recognised work, must conform to acceptable standards inherent in English literature. Therefore, it is disturbing to note that written material on Aborigines gains its recognition through non-Aboriginal norms in literature.

It is even more disturbing to realise that Aboriginal writers lack credibility simply because whites have little understanding of what the true Aboriginal concept is in literature written by Aborigines about themselves. For example, if an Aboriginal was to write about the Aboriginal right to land he would most certainly express the Aboriginal view of complete autonomy of ownership, of self-government and complete power of decisions concerning Aboriginal land. He could go on to explain that this Aboriginal land will be used for traditional hunting and food foraging activities. Most whites would immediately consider this in their value system thus:

1. Aborigines must be mad to believe they are entitled to have a separate, autonomous government in our country.
2. What good can come from giving blacks land if they are not going to use it for any viable purpose, and anyway there are few tribal blacks to go hunting and foraging. "Hence the land belongs to white and not blacks and anyway all the part-Aboriginal, non-tribal and detribalized blacks lost their Aboriginal ways years ago, so the Aboriginals views are not valid."

There goes the credibility of the Aboriginal writer!

The trend of writing is governed by a standard of white values which, like Australian law, provides little scope for Aboriginal values to be recognised. The white value system is most evident in the education system where accredited writing material is mainly used. Literature concerning Aborigines is therefore recognised as being valid because it was written by white people who have the necessary qualifications from that education system to validate it. Anthropologists are, in my view, the most damaging group of academics relating to Aboriginality in this country because of this validated right of authority which is recognised in literature about Aborigines. Anthropologists pointedly exclude present day Aborigines from any recognition of identity as pertaining to the findings in their written work.

Indeed, almost all recognised academic literature about Tasmanian Aborigines ends with Truganini. To my knowledge all recognised academic reference about present day Aborigines in Tasmania is racist in terms of classification of skin colour, blood purity and general features, not excluding the many other references the white value system imposes on contemporary Aborigines Australia wide.

It is for these reasons that I say it is imperative for Aborigines to write; write for children, sure, but more importantly to write for a credible Aboriginal existence through, and in, literature. Aboriginal writers must, of course, use English when writing, they must also use English procedures when writing. Unfortunately there are few Aborigines who have survived the white education system and gained a standard of education without being indoctrinated. By this, I mean that to be able to learn in a system which is alien to Aboriginality

in its present form, an Aborigine is, through the necessity to understand what is being taught, under pressure to recognise the validity of literature currently being used in the education system.

Therefore, Aborigines who do survive, or de-program, should assert their Aboriginality in literature to such an extent that future white Australian society will be able to come to terms with Aboriginality through the "Aboriginal Story". This should be done with a view towards gaining for Aboriginal literary expression a just recognition of validity in the white education system.

THIS CANNOT BE DONE IF ABORIGINAL WRITERS CONFORM TO THE WHITE MAN'S STANDARDS OF ACCEPTABILITY.

The Aboriginal Story

What is the Aboriginal Story? If a Tasmanian Aboriginal was to write his Aboriginal Story in the 1980's it would not be accepted because the white value system denies his Aboriginal identity through the literature it validates. It is an Aboriginal Story! And I deny white people the right to make any such judgment until they can truly accept Aboriginality for what it is. The Aboriginal Story is to be told by Aborigines in a way which only they can express. The Aboriginal Story is the very concept of Aboriginality, past, present and future. Not how whites believe it to be, but how it is known to Aborigines.

The Aboriginal Dreamtime is not just a collection of stories for kids, it is a historical tradition of education about "What is", and the Aboriginal understanding of the land, the sky and the living. That is "What is". Present day Aborigines have not lost the Dreamtime, indeed, it is their

strength and unity of understanding their own Aboriginality which is the present Dreamtime. Almost everything Tasmanian Aborigines are expressing about their Aboriginality today has been ridiculed and treated as not being significant in the white values of Aboriginality.

Yet the very active presence of Aboriginality is being lived today, here, in Tasmania. To support this statement I draw attention to the fact that it is as recent as 1951 that the Aboriginal Reserves Act was repealed in Tasmania. The Cape Barren Island Aboriginal reserve was ended and the "Cape Barren Islanders" were denied their Aboriginal identity by the State Government of the day. In startling contrast to this the State Government used Commonwealth funds for Aboriginal Affairs to move the Aborigines off the island and assimilate them in the community on the Tasmanian mainland. Although these people were spread out in the mainland community they have held together through their kinship and natural Aboriginality as one people.

There are seven Aboriginal organisations currently operating in Tasmania to cope with the needs of 3,000 Aborigines as evidenced in the 1976 census, it is believed the recent census figures will be nearer 5,000. There are Aborigines working in specifically Aboriginal positions in the Commonwealth and State Public Service in Tasmania. Two Aboriginal students attend this university and 360 Aboriginal students received Aboriginal Study or Secondary Grants for the year 1980-81. There can be no doubt that Aboriginality is a reality in Tasmania, and on this point there can be do doubt that Aboriginality is a reality in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and any other place where Aborigines may be.

There is conflict in literature about Aborigines when written about whites. If, for instance, a group of Aboriginals have driven a car to go hunting wildlife or foraging for shellfish, it would be emphasised that these people drove a car and hunted wallaby like many white people do, therefore they cannot be "Real Aboriginals". An Aborigine would correctly write that the Aboriginal people hunted wallaby as a normal activity inherent to their people long before whitemen came, and they travelled by car simply because they could. There then, is the conflict in literature because the different beliefs of a situation are not equal.

It is obvious that the Aboriginal Story can only be told by Aborigines. It is also obvious that the Aboriginal Story is not easily accepted by whites. Aborigines are coming to understand the white man's way of thinking, they are also reaching a conclusion that white people are not able to come to terms with what Aboriginality really is, and in fact Aborigines have not made a stand on the issue because of it.

The Aboriginal Story in education

Aborigines are not treating education lightly. European styled education is recognised for its worth by Aborigines, yet Aboriginal education has gained little recognition from whites. Aborigines want "two-way" education, European education on one hand and Aboriginal education on the other.

The Aboriginal Story can be an educating tool it does not have to be of tribal Aborigines to be "Truly Aboriginal". It only needs to be Aboriginal to have that distinction. What I mean here, for example, is that the literary work about Aboriginal culture in an urban situation, written by an Aborigine living in a Sydney slum area, should not present any more conflict

of recognition than a sculpture of the Virgin Mary by an Italian living in a remote Aboriginal community.

The education system is all important in the responsibility towards creating an honest awareness of Aboriginality. I can only accept that by the teaching of tribal Aboriginality exclusively, there can be no acceptance by whites of our present day Aboriginality, our people and their inherent rights.

The Aboriginal Story, as written by Aborigines, would give children a much clearer image of Aboriginality today than all the stereo-type literature currently being used, and condoned, in education.

The inherent right to teach children is part of all cultural aspirations. The right to teach Aboriginality is ours alone, it is separate and should not be subjected to different values being heaped on it by people who don't belong to it. If we are to teach our children about their Aboriginality through Aboriginal writers, teachers and other Aboriginal experts, then the reason for Aborigines to write for children is there. If Aborigines would teach their children using Aboriginal literature, it stands to reason that white people would have access to the most authentic material ever available about Aborigines.

Aboriginal identity

To understand the conflict in Aboriginal identity we must look at what is already written about Aborigines. "ALL POINTS NORTH" is my motto for how non-Aboriginal writers clarify Aboriginal identity. There is a never ending stream of academic literature about Aborigines in the Northern Territory, Northern Queensland, Northern Western Australia and Central Australia which has a major tendency towards tribal Aboriginal identity. With reference to living Aboriginals it appears that

these highly qualified academics and their followers (e.g. social writers) are not capable of writing a credible account of Aboriginal identity outside of distinctive tribal areas. These qualified quacks honestly believe they have the right to classify, clarify and identify people they don't even understand, e.g. Tasmanian Aborigines.

We can say that because it's true that the greatest amount of anthropological work about Aborigines in Tasmania, as mentioned earlier, ends with Truganini. I personally have no knowledge of any literary work that has attempted an honest expression of present day Aborigines in Tasmania. It's about time white Australians got off the academic horse when it comes to Aboriginal identity. The fact is that there is only one horse in this area and it is apparent that Aborigines are the only ones who can ride it.

WE ARE ABORIGINES BECAUSE WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ABORIGINES

Aboriginal identity is being Aborigine, thinking Aboriginally and being spiritually Aboriginal. Only an Aborigine can know that. Tasmanian Aborigines are the most suppressed and deprived people in Australia. Since Tasmanian Aborigines, as a whole race, are still denied their rightful identity, they are descriminated against in the most ambivalent terms; - e.g. you're not whites, but you're not Aborigines, given the most blatant lip service by governments and "educated" out of existence by that system. You are educated out of existence through the education system which expounds the only recognised literature as a valid account of genocide.

Our identity is denied to the extent that it is almost totally impossible for white poeple, who sincerely try to come to terms with Tasmanian Aboriginal identity, to overcome the odds of them doing so. Our people have been in this identity situation for over one hundred years. To survive is one thing, but the identity problems caused through an ever rising denial of identity is something of which few white people would ever have a clear understanding.

Aboriginal writers must gain recognition as qualified writers to set the record straight, otherwise white people are teaching the children a pack of lies and causing no end to problems with our kids.

Writing for children

Every writer writes for other people to read. It is accepted that writers of fact write in an attempt to influence other people's knowledge and thinking. Naturally the influence is directed towards what the writer believes to be true and correct. This does not necessarily mean that what is written is in fact true and correct.

What I have said throughout this paper is that whites do not write the Aboriginal Story as seen by Aborigines, therefore it is not true and correct. Children are objects of literary influence because their initiation towards gaining an academic grading of one kind or another is through the written word. Writing for children is really an exercise of telling children of adult beliefs and legends in a way they will be able to understand and relate it to the adult equivalent. A child's general philosophies and concepts rely on what he is taught and how it is imparted.

Why Aborigines should be writing for children

Aborigines should be writing for all age groups but it is important to know your audience level to be able to write for it. Writing for children is merely a 'Tip of the Iceberg' thing towards total acceptance of the work of a truly Aboriginal nature. I have already stated that Aboriginal writers attain little recognition for their work if it does not conform to the value system of white people.

If white people believe that 'Aboriginal Dreamtime' stories are merely fairy tales, and therefore, are acceptable for their children to read for that reason only, then it is my view that the Aboriginal concept is considered as some kind of fantasy, with no "reality" in the white concept. How then are we to write for children? Will we write the true story of oppression? Will it be accepted?

People who believe that Aborigines should only paint a glowing picture of blacks in this white society are totally incapable of accepting the work of Aboriginal writers. Of course Aborigines should be writing for children, but how can we do this with Aboriginal clarity if we must compete with academics for credibility within the suppressive restrictions of acceptable literature of an alien society?

That question is not easily answered, my paper has been mainly directed at the negative side because it outweighs the positive. Nevertheless, Aboriginal literature will become part of our Aboriginal culture, and I see it as only a matter of time before it will be accepted by white Australians.

In most cases in considering future literature by Aborigines, it will be a necessity for Aborigines to be qualified in the dominant Education System to be recognised as valid writers, but let there be no doubt that there is a need

for "Aboriginal education" (like white education) to validate Aboriginal writers of the "Aboriginal Story". Maybe everybody will not agree it should be so, but there it is.

Aborigines want to participate in the future development of this country at all levels, in an artistic way, a cultural way and an Aboriginal way. We want children to have the right of reading for their education, their pleasure, and their integrity.

Aborigines <u>should</u> be writing for children, tomorrow's Australians. So they may understand us and our separatism in this society, so they may accept us for what we are, and how we see ourselves. Aboriginal stories for children can hold a child's attention from the fantasy to the realistic. These are the major reasons, in my belief, why Aborigines should write for children.

ABORIGINES SHOULD BE WRITING FOR CHILDREN

AUSTRALIA SHOULD ENSURE CHILDREN THE RIGHT OF TRUTH

BLANK PAGE

SAD CHANGES

With a heavy heart I live this life,
In a world that has no end to strife,
That we suffer for white man's shame,
Denied our rights and passed the blame.
T'is not a sadness because we're down,
Our struggles I know will bring us 'round.
More a sadness of the White advance,
As they ruin cultures to suit their stance.

And whilst they ruin our culture old,
Themselves have little tradition to hold.
Lost of culture they settled our land,
Cultureless Whites in the timeless sand.
Through 200 years the inevitable change,
Our culture challenged must re-arrange.
Traditional life must change with this tide,
The days of the past are for us now denied.

Our Sons and Daughters must never let go,
We of the old time must teach all we know.
T'is a white man's world they are to live,
Let us ensure they have something to give.
Our culture and dreaming, our very being,
Must go to the future forever appearing.
Our pride of our past, today and ahead,
Aboriginal culture must never be dead.

So let us record our past with delight,
For future generations to keep in their sight.
That cultural changes we know must evolve,
Will change with our children and never dissolve.
We have a strong traditional creed,
Recognising changes as something decreed.
And regardless of man as time passes by,
Our Aboriginal culture we must never let die.

Jim Everett.

MAWBANA PLEREGANANNA

PROGRAMME

Friday 25 September

7:30 p.m.	Registration
8:15 p.m.	Conference Opening and welcome. Glenn Pullen, President, Tasmanian Branch, Children's Book Council.
8:30 p.m.	Walter McVitty, Senior Lecturer, Department of Librarianship, Melbourne State College. *A Survey of the Treatment of Aborigines and their Culture in Children's Literature.* Chairperson: Twila Herr, President, Tasmanian Branch, Library Association of Australia.

Wine and cheese social hour.

Saturday 26 September

9:00 - 10:30 a.m.	Bill Scott, Author. *Some Thoughts on the Aborigine as Represented in Children's Literature.* Chairperson: Berenice Eastman, Teacher-Librarian, Bellerive Primary School.
10:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Morning Tea
11:00 - 12:30 p.m.	Margaret Dunkle, Children's Literature Consultant. *An Examination of Specific Aspects of Aboriginality in Children's Literature.* Chairperson: Glenn Pullen.
12:30 - 2:00 p.m.	Lunch
2:00 - 3:00 p.m.	Screening of *"Manganinnie"*. (Theatre 2, University Centre)
3:30 - 4:00 p.m.	Afternoon tea in Senior Common Room.
4:00 - 5:00 p.m.	John Honey, Director, Tasmanian Film Corporation. *The Aboriginal Motif in the film "Manganinnie".* Chairperson: John Levett, Head, School of Librarianship, University of Tasmania.
7:30 for 8:00 p.m.	Conference Dinner Monro's Restaurant Sandy Bay.

Sunday 27 September

9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Rosalind Langford, State Secretary, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre. *The Effects of the Way Aboriginality is Portrayed in Children's Literature on the Child's Attitudinal Development.*
	Chairperson: Marlene Heron, Home School Liaison Officer, Tasmanian Education Department.
10:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Morning Tea
11:00 - 12:00 noon	Jim Everett, State Aboriginal Liaison Officer. *Why Aborigines Should be Writing for Children.*
	Chairperson: Paul Cruttenden, Curriculum Department, Tasmanian Education Department.
12:00 - 12:45 p.m.	Hugo McCann and John Shelton, Centre for Education, University of Tasmania. *Concluding remarks.*
1:00 p.m.	Conference Close.

REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS

Davis Allen
Heather Amdur
Jean Applebee
Alex Barlow
Ray Bartle
Rhoda Bennett
Peter Black
Margaret Blow
Rosemary Brown
Lyn Calitz
Georgie Cane
Sally Caro
Heather Chauncy
Margaret Combes
Jennifer Connor
Paul Cruttenden
Philippe De Zilwa
Penny Dobson
Jane Donaldson
Edna Driscoll
Kay Dunbar
Margaret Dunkle
Berenice Eastman
Sirima Ediweera
Frances Elias
Barbara Elkhorne
Jim Everett
Heather Felton
Angela Field
Patricia Foster
Christine Frey
Pat Gilbert
Margaret Giordano
Robin Goodram
Joan Goodrick
Margaret Hankey
Marlene Heron
Twila Herr
Claire Hiller
John Honey
Robin Hull
Elaine Hutchinson
Elizabeth Jones
Catherine Joyce
Margot Korbell
Andy Kowaluk

Helen Laidlaw
Rosalind Langford
Stella Lees
John Levett
Hugo McCann
Joan McInnes
Margaret McFarlane
Walter McVitty
Lindsay Masatori
Janet Metherall
Peter Metherall
Anne Morgan
Helen Morris
Veronica Mulder
Rosemary Nilsson
David O'Connor
John Otten
Pat Patten
Karmen Pemberton
Liz Pope
Glenn Pullen
Neville Rayner
Julie Rimes
Beth Roberts
Maurie Ryan
Miriam Sayer
Bill Scott
Judy Scott
Mark Shaw
John Shelton
Nada Slicer
Thomas Solly
Bronwen Steele
Leonie Stitz
Mary Taylor
Heather Thurstans
Fiona Tulk
Ans Van Heyster
Mary Walker
Alison Waters
David Waters
Felicity Watsford
Ann Webster
Chris White
Jean Wilkie
Jenny Wilson